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CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT

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FEATURES

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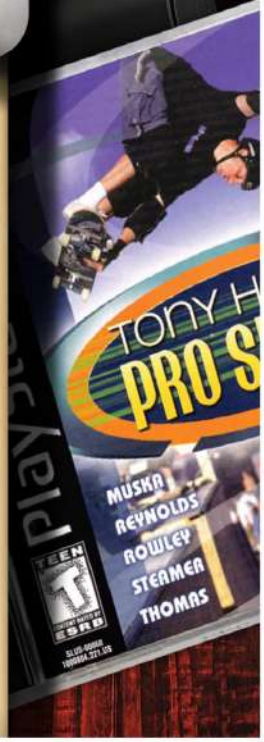

SHINING FORCE: THE EARLY YEARS

HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI REVISITS HIS ICONIC STRATEGY SERIES

IN THE CHAIR: TONY POMFRET

THE TALENTED C64 CODER WALKS US THROUGH HIS 30-YEAR CAREER

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TONY HAWK'S GAME?

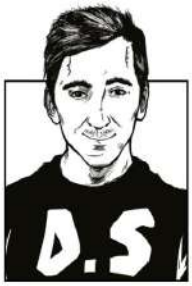
DARRAN JONES

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2X for me. An amazing Xbox exclusive featuring all the levels from the first two games, as well as some new ones.

Expertise:
Building the ultimate gaming/work-from-home room

Currently playing:
Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



DREW SLEEP

I got my kicks from playing as Darth Maul in *Pro Skater 3* and doing his Sith Saber Spin signature move over and over.

Expertise:
Being **RG**'s de facto skater (I have the cuts and bruises to prove it!)

Currently playing:
Final Fantasy XIV: Shadowbringers

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII

NICK THORPE

It's got to be *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* for me. The soundtrack's a belter, the stage design is excellent and I actually liked the way you had to plan an end point for your combos.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing:
Mr Driller: DrillLand

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

ANDY SALTER

The Simpsons Skateboarding. Okay, it's not a *Tony Hawk's* game but I never played any of them, probably because I liked *The Simpsons* more than skateboarding games. Also, I enjoyed skating around and exploring Springfield.

Expertise:
Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing:
Mount and Blade II: Bannerlord

Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War

HARETH AL BUSTANI

It has to be the groundbreaking *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, just because the concept was so novel, and the execution so iconic.

Expertise:
Juggling obscure games, words and guitar and seeing where it lands

Currently playing:
Mount and Blade II: Bannerlord

Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island

PAUL DRURY

The first *Tony Hawk's* impressed me with its open-ended gameplay, but when it comes to skateboarding games, I'll always be a *720°* man...

Expertise:
Commercial Breaks shenanigans

Currently playing:
Dominos

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

WARREN BROWN

Pro Skater 2. It was my first experience of the series, and I played it on a PC... with cursor keys!

Expertise:
Making good on my claim that I could 'create' a skateboard in Photoshop!

Currently playing:
Tempest 2000 (and beating Nick's high score :P)

Favourite game of all time:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

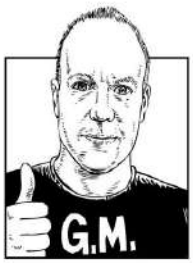
MARTYN CARROLL

THPS 4, on the PlayStation. I had to write a player's guide for the game and was dreading it (especially as the PS2 version looked so much better), but I really got into it and it wasn't the chore I was expecting. Good tunes, too!

Expertise:
Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:
Paper Mario: The Origami King

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



GRAEME MASON

That first game from 1999 on the Playstation – not just for its smart and intuitive gameplay, but also that cool soundtrack.

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Fallout Shelter

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4

LOADING...

You may not believe it to look at me now, but back in the day I used to do a fair bit of skateboarding. I'd regularly hang out in a little gang with some mates and we'd hit the half pipe at Slade's Farm skate park (it's still there) and dangerously skate on the roof of the Horizon garage near my mate Paul's house (that's still there, too). Hell, we'd even take the trucks off our wheels in winter and slide down dangerously icy hills on just our boards – something I absolutely do not recommend.

By the time the first *Tony Hawk's* game had come out, my skateboarding days were well behind me, but the game instantly connected with me; not just because it looked fantastic, but because it captured the competitive nature and exhilaration of the sport so well. Over the years, I've enjoyed countless versions of the game, so it's rather satisfying to see how the series evolved – sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

Even if skateboarding isn't your jam, I'm confident you'll find plenty to enjoy in this issue, from our round-up of essential Evercade games, to an in-depth look at *Scuba Dive* and *Conquests Of Camelot*. Enjoy the issue and make sure you check out our fantastic *Pac-Man*-themed subs offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine!

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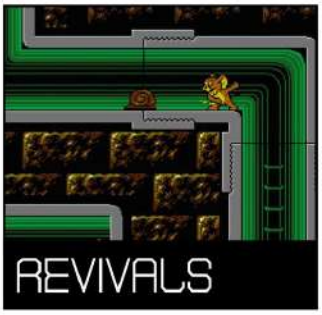

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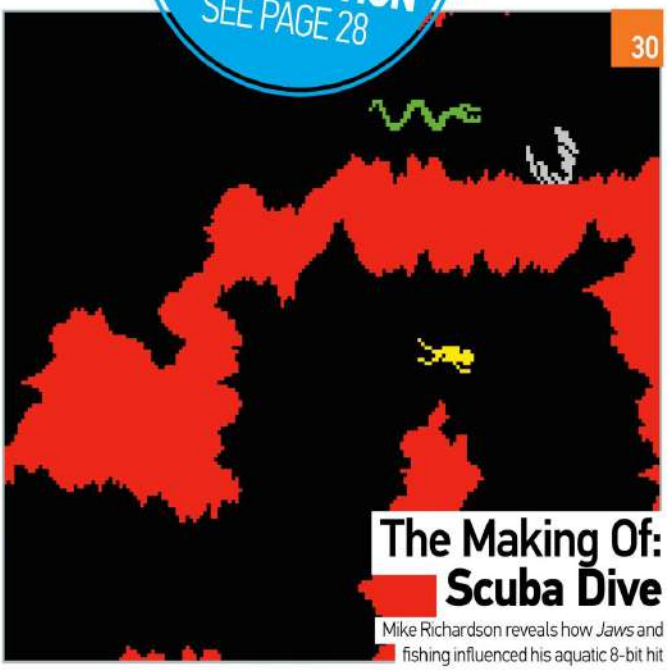

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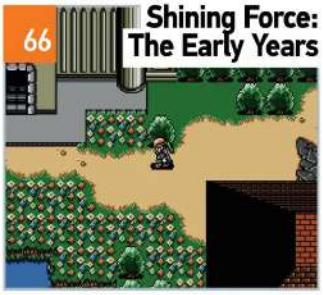
The Making Of: Scuba Dive

Mike Richardson reveals how *Jaws* and fishing influenced his aquatic 8-bit hit



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» [Arcade] *Revenge Of Death Adder* never got a home release originally, so this is a welcome inclusion.

MORE MINI MADNESS FROM SEGA

The Japanese publisher reveals a brand-new miniature machine

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Nick jumps back to time where toilet paper was readily available and celebrities didn't sing on Instagram

Sega is making the most of its 60th anniversary. Despite the global pandemic, the publisher has been giving its fans plenty to look forward to, including the reveal of Sega Shiro, the son of Sega's mascot, Segata Sanshiro; the remaster of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* we showcased last month; a UFO Catcher that lets you grab all manner of iconic items from the Sega vault, as well as a selection of mini Game Gear consoles.

It would appear that Sega is just getting warmed up, however, as it has just announced a brand-new mini console, and if we're honest, we're incredibly excited about the potential of this new miniature beast. We say 'beast', because Sega's latest micro console is hosting some incredibly powerful games (for the time they originally came out at least) and unlike the Mega Drive Mini and Game Gear Micro, it's choosing to focus on actual arcade games, and some of them are very exciting indeed.

» [Arcade] Interestingly, no Super Scaler games, such as *Space Harrier*, have been announced yet.

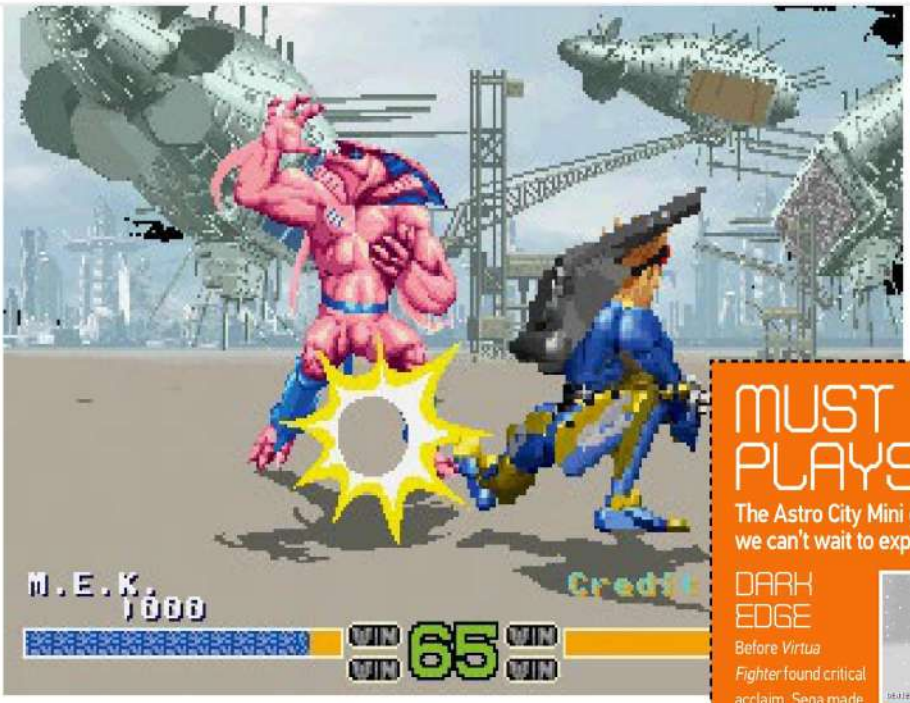
» While the hardware is made by Sega Toys, Yosuke Okunari has revealed that neither he nor M2 are involved with the system.

The machine itself is called the Astro City Mini and, as you've probably guessed, it's based on the popular arcade cabinet of the same name. Originally released in 1993, the 750x1445x905mm cabinet was JAMMA-compatible and a stalwart of Japanese arcades. Even today, they remain extremely popular with arcade collectors and you'll often see them on show at various gaming events. They immediately stand out compared to other cabs of the time, thanks to their huge 29-inch screens, white casing and vivid green and pink stick-and-button configurations. Needless to say, Sega is adopting this look for its new miniaturised version, although the size is shrunk down considerably to 130x170x170mm, which means it's going to be a lot more portable than the original and more on par with SNK's Neo Geo Mini. Another nice touch of the Astro City Mini is that Sega is promising that while the new buttons are smaller than those found in the original cabinets, they will be made from the same material, which should please those looking for authenticity.

Of course a mini console is nothing without its games, and this is where things get really interesting with the Astro City Mini as it seems to be cramming a fair amount of Sega's arcade heritage into its tiny innards. The ten included games only currently

» [Arcade] *Altered Beast* feels a little weak next to the other included brawlers, but we'll still play it.

» [Arcade] It's unclear if we'll get any Model 2 games, but the inclusion of *Virtua Fighter* suggests Sega's new system is fairly capable.



» [Arcade] Titles like *Dark Edge* are a huge draw for us. Hopefully more oddities like this will be announced.

cover an eight-year period (1986 to 1993) but it's already featuring some stone-cold classics as well as obscure curios. By far the most exciting news is that both *Dark Edge* and *Golden Axe: Revenge Of Death Adder* will feature on the system. Aside from being licensed for Arcade 1-Up's recently released *Golden Axe* arcade cabinet, the arcade sequel has never received a home port before, so we're keen to see what it's like on the Astro City Mini. *Dark Edge* is another game that's never received a home release and like *Golden Axe: Revenge Of Death Adder*, it was originally released on Sega's System 32 board, meaning other possible contenders such as *Arabian Fight*, *Rad Mobile* and *Jurassic Park* could appear.

The technical capabilities of the system go higher than just being able to emulate the System 32, System 16 and System 18 boards, as Sega's inclusion of *Virtua Fighter* also reveals that the machine is going to be capable of covering Model 1 games, which means that *Virtua Racing*, *Wing War* and *Star Wars Arcade* could be potential inclusions

» [Arcade] Will games like *Alien Storm* offer three-player support, or will they be a more lonely experience?

as well. And before you scoff at the thought of *Star Wars* appearing on the Astro City Mini, it's worth remembering that Sega was unafraid to licence all manner of games to appear on the Mega Drive Mini, so there's every chance that *Star Wars*, the aforementioned *Jurassic Park* and even releases like *Alien 3: The Gun* and *Spider-Man The Video Game* could surprise us with their inclusions.

They're more unlikely, however, and a safer bet is additional System 16 games, such as *E-Swat*, *Shinobi* and *Dynamite Dux*, as well as System 18 games like *Shadow Dancer*. Another interesting omission so far is that no Super Scaler games are being showcased, which means no *Out Run*, *Super Hang-On*, *Space Harrier* and *After Burner*. Admittedly, they might not work as well with that joystick, but if the Astro City Mini is going to showcase Sega's arcade heritage we'd expect them to be announced sooner rather than later.

As we went to press, there was no news to whether the Astro City Mini will be released in the west, meaning import websites are going to be your best chance of securing one. While the machine itself retails for 12,800 yen (around £93) you can expect shipping and import charges to push that closer to the £130 mark, which makes it one of the more expensive minis currently on the market. Another thing to keep in mind is that while standalone pads are currently available to purchase, websites like Amazon Japan currently aren't shipping them to the UK, which means they might end up being an extremely expensive addition. We'll bring you more news as we get it, but as it stands, Sega's new mini is something you should be keeping an eye on. We certainly are. ✱

» It's really hard to preorder the separate pads. Hopefully, the Mega Drive Mini pads will be compatible.

MUST PLAYS

The Astro City Mini games we can't wait to experience

DARK EDGE

Before *Virtua Fighter* found critical acclaim, Sega made this interesting attempt at a 3D fighting game. While the strict use of 3D means the controls are rather challenging, the distinctive cyberpunk theme (characters include a mutant and a cybernetically enhanced soldier) and smart scaling visuals certainly help make it stand out.

VIRTUA FIGHTER

It's certainly showing its age nowadays, but Sega's polygonal brawler is still worth revisiting. While it wasn't the first one-on-one fighter to use polygons, it set the template for everything that followed, including Sega's own sequels. It's not clear if we'll get any Model 2 games on the Astro City Mini so this will probably be a technical showcase for the system.

GOLDEN AXE: REVENGE OF DEATH ADDER

It's a crying shame this never got a home release back in the day as it's an excellent follow-up to Sega's fantasy-themed original. Graphically it's a huge improvement over *Golden Axe*, and there are four new characters to tackle and plenty of weird beasts to ride. It's not pushing the genre in terms of innovation, but it remains a satisfying brawler.

YOUR NES, BUT BLOCKIER

Lego and Nintendo have joined forces to create a NES-themed Lego set. It's quite an elaborate piece of design, including over 2,600 pieces enabling you to build the console, a controller, a cartridge and a television. There are plenty of neat touches – it's possible to open the cartridge port and slide the cartridge in, and the controller connects to the console. More impressively, the TV simulates a classic game of *Super Mario Bros*, via a crank that scrolls a level on continuous belt. This Lego set should be on sale now at an eyebrow-raising price of £209.99.

TOTALLY GAME PRESSES START

Future's video team at Barcroft Studios has been busy scouring the world for stories about the real lives of some extraordinary gamers, and the result is a new series called *Totally Game*. While you'll doubtless be most excited by the tour of the arcade that Jeremy built in his family home, other stories are equally fascinating – we were amazed by the skills of RockyNoHands, who plays *Call Of Duty* with his mouth due to his paralysis. The series is available on *GamesRadar+*, with new episodes debuting each Wednesday on YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok.

LONG LIVE THE KING OF KONG?

» Billy Mitchell's first Guinness World Records entry dates back to 1982.

BILLY MITCHELL'S SCORES REINSTATED BY GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

A number of *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man* scores set by the famed classic gaming competitor Billy Mitchell have been reinstated by Guinness World Records, following an appeal. The scores had originally been disqualified by the record-keeping organisation Twin Galaxies in 2018, following an investigation into allegations that some of Billy Mitchell's scores had been set via emulation rather than on real hardware. Guinness World Records initially followed suit, as it had a long-standing arrangement to recognise gaming records set via Twin Galaxies adjudication, but this decision has now been reversed. The judgment means that Billy Mitchell is once again recognised by the organisation as the first player to complete a perfect game of *Pac-Man* and the first *Donkey Kong* player to score a million points.

The key claim in the decision to disqualify Billy's scores was that video footage of three of his scores on *Donkey Kong* showed a distinctive quirk in the way the screen is drawn at the start of a level. This behaviour is characteristic of old versions of MAME and does not happen on real arcade boards. Billy disputed these claims in a 156-page evidence package, in which he alleged that tapes were tampered with and that at least one of the scores was never intended as a submission – though it has now been reinstated as a former world record.

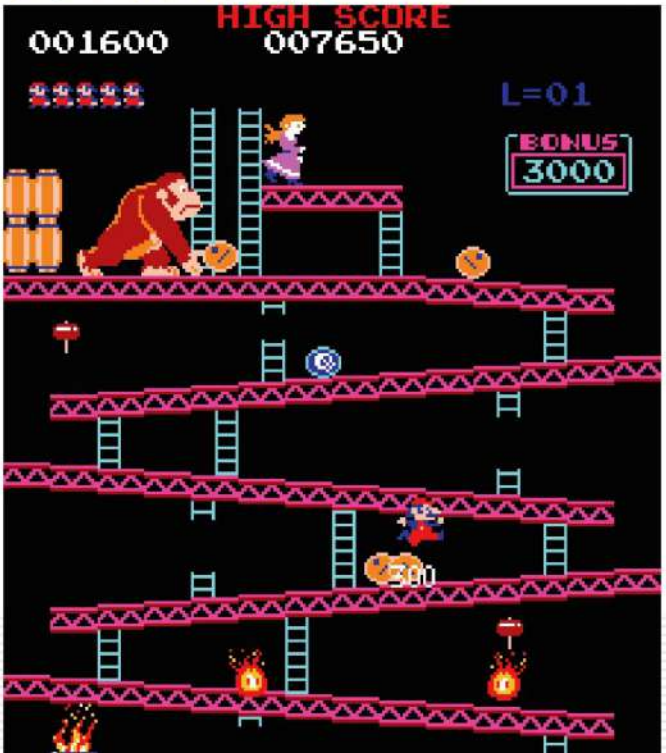
Speaking in a video statement confirming the reinstatement of the scores, Guinness World Records editor in chief Craig Glenday said that investigating the case "involved both reviewing the existing evidence and newly sourced eyewitness testimony, plus some new expert gameplay analysis and hardware verification". Craig continued to explain that the appeal was successful as "there just wasn't sufficient evidence to support the disqualification across the board". However, the statement stopped short of discrediting the evidence against Billy, with Craig stating, "In cases such as this where there is debate, we would typically defer to the original contemporaneous adjudication, and this is the case here."

We contacted Guinness World Records with the hope of learning more about the evidence alluded to in this statement, as well as for clarification on how appeals are conducted and investigated. However, the company declined to participate in an interview and instead referred us back to its press release on the decision. We also reached out to Billy Mitchell and Twin Galaxies owner Jace Hall, but neither was willing to comment on the record as the issue is far from settled. Twin Galaxies has not recognised the validity of the scores, and Billy is suing the organisation for defamation. Proceedings are going slowly due to the current global COVID-19 pandemic, and the next hearing is not scheduled until October.

In the meantime, we're left with more questions than answers. How did Guinness World Records determine that the appeal was actually valid? Does this break with Twin Galaxies' adjudication signal the end of the relationship between the two groups? Has this decision convinced those who doubt Billy Mitchell's scores? The only thing that is really clear at this moment in time is that neither party is backing down, and the lawsuit is likely to rumble on for some time to come. Twin Galaxies will continue accepting new score submissions, and Billy Mitchell will continue to compete on classic games, as the original disqualification renewed his drive to perform at public events and – thanks to the encouragement of his son – via live streaming on Twitch. We'll keep an eye on this story and report more when there are major developments to share. ✱

» [Arcade] Billy Mitchell's best known achievement is his perfect *Pac-Man* game from 1999, a world first.

» [Arcade] It was *Donkey Kong* video footage that triggered the initial dispute at Twin Galaxies.



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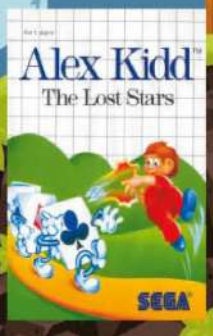

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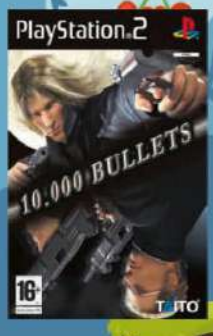

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Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

Control! Control! Control!

Last issue, I spoke about joysticks. You knew where you were with a joystick. It's a simple piece of equipment. Nothing unnecessary there at all. A kid picking up a joystick knows instinctively what to do with the flippin' thing.

I lost my radio gig the other week, and to try and cheer myself up, I dug out my N64. It's been sitting untouched on a shelf ever since I bought it years ago. I dusted it off, plugged it in, and away I went.

Except, and please don't laugh, I could not remember how to hold the controller! I hadn't played on one of these beasts for a very long time, and it just would not sit in my hand. I spent a few minutes switching it from left to right, trying all kinds of configurations. No, it just would not *fit*, for want of a better word. I put it down and closed my eyes.

I bought my first N64 when I got a job on the telly hosting *The 11 O'Clock Show*. I'd gone from signing on for years to getting a cheque for several thousand pounds. I didn't know what to do with all this money! I literally didn't know what to do with it as I saved not one penny for tax, but that's a story for HMRC – which did eventually get paid, I promise! Going from 'no money' to 'comparatively lots of' initially threw me and I was hesitant to spend it. The first thing I got was a real object of decadence, the N64. It was a luxury because I already had a PlayStation. Two consoles? No, no, no! Surely only kings and rock stars can live like that? Not ordinary people like me.

I tried to remember when I bought it. In my mind, I went back to that dingy flat in North London that I shared with Mackenzie Crook, and was owned by a very dodgy gentleman who claimed he was good friends with Brad Pitt and insisted we paid the rent in cash, to see if I could picture having difficulty with the controller back then. And no, I couldn't remember any issue. So what was the problem now?

And here's where I suspect I will have to hand in my **Retro Gamer** membership card (all writers get one, made of platinum no less!). I had to watch a YouTube video on how to hold the controller. Let that sink in for a second. A 47-year-old man, already feeling humiliated for losing his job, now has to sink to the new low of watching an instructional video on how to hold a toy. Once it was explained, it made a kind of sense. I vowed never to tell anyone of my shame (shh, let's keep this between us) and proceeded to play *Perfect Dark*. I'm afraid I only lasted about 20 minutes because I got terribly queasy from motion sickness and had to stop. I decided then I'd had enough with Nintendo and instead got out my original Xbox and played *From Russia With Love*, which is a pretty decent game. Now there's a controller I can understand! ✱

> "I spent a few minutes switching it from left to right, trying all kinds of configurations. No, it just would not fit for want of a better word"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

SIGN UP

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Asking THAT question

What's the point at which a game, or console, becomes retro? Right now, the PS4 and Xbox One are in their twilight years, a whole new generation of gaming hardware is ready to step out of the wings and carry entire brands on their shoulders.

The PS4 and Xbox One will begin the steady shuffle towards the doors of the retirement home, where they'll live out the remainder of their days, swapping stories with the Xbox 360, original PlayStation and 3DO, between games of dominos and art therapy, while the Virtual Boy runs naked up and down the halls, whooping and chattering, and hammering on doors.

Back in the Nineties, when *Digitiser* was a thing, I think we were among the first – if not *the* first – gaming publications to embrace the idea of retro, with a weekly retrospective entitled *Old Game: Here*. My love of games was built on a foundation of those I'd grown up playing, and I never really understood the way games were – at least then – considered disposable. Great art should last forever, not get tossed aside. Jimi Hendrix albums aren't called 'retro music'; they're considered eternal. *Star Wars* is a perennial film, not a 'retro movie'.

But perhaps because of the way technology evolves with gaming hardware, there's a different attitude towards games compared to other forms of entertainment. It didn't even cross my mind that we were doing something at odds to the rest of the relentlessly forward-looking gaming media. Nevertheless… the pace of progress was breakneck compared to today.

At the time I started *Digitiser* I was 21. Many of the games we covered on *Old Game: Here* were less than ten years old, yet to my young brain they felt ancient. I mean, compare a game from 1983 – let's say… *Manic Miner* – to one released in 1993 – *Doom* – and they're night and day. Very different games, as a result of the technology they were running on.

Now, 2010 feels like yesterday, yet *Red Dead Redemption*, *Fallout: New Vegas*, *Call Of Duty: Black Ops*, and *Super Meat Boy* are all 2010 games, but I could've sworn they were five years old at most. So… are they retro now, even though none of them really look vastly different to the games we're playing in 2020?

Again, where's the cut-off? When do we classify a game as retro? At the risk of undermining this very magazine's entire reason for existing, should we be thinking about gaming differently, as the leaps between generations of hardware becomes ever more minimal?

I've seen the videos of the upcoming PS5 games. Despite all the hype about ray tracing – whatever that is – and instant load times (er, yeah, we had those back in 1979, thanks), I've seen little evidence that the forthcoming generation is going to offer brand-new types of games.

Yet here we are; by the end of this year, *Red Dead Redemption II*, *The Last of Us Part II*, *No Man's Sky*… will all be part of a previous generation. They'll be retro, according to the definition we've used to date. ✱

> "My love of games was built on a foundation of those I'd grown up playing, and I never really understood the way games were – at least then – considered disposable"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

That belongs in a museum!

Andy Spencer reveals how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting his Retro Computer Museum

The Retro Computer Museum has been running since 2008 and is dedicated to the preservation of classic consoles and computers from the Sixties onwards. Like many similar museums, the COVID-19 pandemic is taking its toll, so RCM's founder Andy Spencer is here to explain how you can help.

Why was the Retro Computer Museum first set up?

The museum was originally set up because I had around 20 systems or so from my youth that were sitting in my loft doing nothing. I spoke to my wife, Linda, and asked her if she thought other people might be interested in what I have. Her answer was yes – so the museum was born. One pretty terrible website later (by me), a friend (Nick) offered to create a much better website with a forum. Obviously, I jumped at the chance! The forums became really popular, so we announced our first event. Our inaugural event happened in a village hall close to where we live in November 2008. We expected a few close friends to turn up, but we had almost 70 people! From then on, we have done lots of events all around the UK. We decided to become a registered charity in 2012 and have never looked back.

What challenges do you face?

Ones that would affect any museum that has hands-on and visual displays. We have to keep the kit in good working order – some of our systems (and games) are over 30 years old! We also try to make sure both the kit itself and the premises are kept clean. We also totally rely on people visiting to survive – we get no funding from anywhere. We need to pay everything out of our entrance fees; these items include rent, electric, gas, water, insurance etc. It all mounts up.

The global pandemic has been impacting businesses and charities worldwide. How has RCM been affected?

During the COVID-19 outbreak, like a lot of places, we have had to close completely – this has cut off all our funding. Thankfully, we had a fantastic start to the year which did help us a little with finances, then this pandemic hit us. We have been closed ever since.

Tell us a little about your JustGiving page...

As a committee, we decided to set up a JustGiving page to see if we could get some support that way. We have been absolutely overwhelmed from the support, literally from our friends all around the world. Peoples' generosity has been staggering, almost humbling to be honest.

How can readers help?

If anybody that hasn't donated would like to help us reach our £30,000 goal, you can donate on our JustGiving page at justgiving.com/retrocomputermuseum – we really do need your help, even £1 would help. Of course, if you can gift aid it too, all the better!

Does the museum receive donations of hardware?

We were receiving donations before the pandemic, usually several a week! These donations include software, hardware and occasionally a monetary donation, too. Thankfully, we have just started getting emails offering donations again. Over the last 12 years, we have had people donate their entire collections to us – involving several systems and games to go with those systems, too. There are way too many generous donations to name just one – so to everybody that has donated, we thank you for helping to make the Retro Computer Museum what it is today!

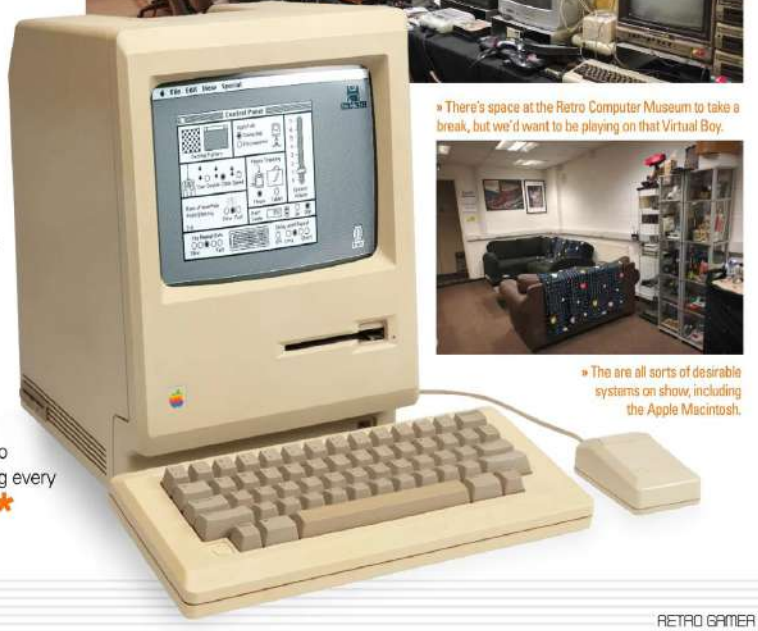
Why do you think places like RCM are so important?

From a purely professional point of view, we share our knowledge, our systems and our games so that everybody, young or old, can enjoy what was and will always be the best times for gaming, where it all started... Without the systems we have in our museum we would not have the gaming systems that we have today. From a more personal point of view, the whole team loves meeting new lifelong friends who tend to visit many times, enjoying every minute of our wonderful place. ★

» The RCM has received many generous donations over the years, with some supporters offering their entire collections.

» There's a range of Commodore systems at the RCM, from the C64 to the incredibly rare CD1200.

» The museum has a variety of different computers and consoles available to use.



» There's space at the Retro Computer Museum to take a break, but we'd want to be playing on that Virtual Boy.

» The are all sorts of desirable systems on show, including the Apple Macintosh.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

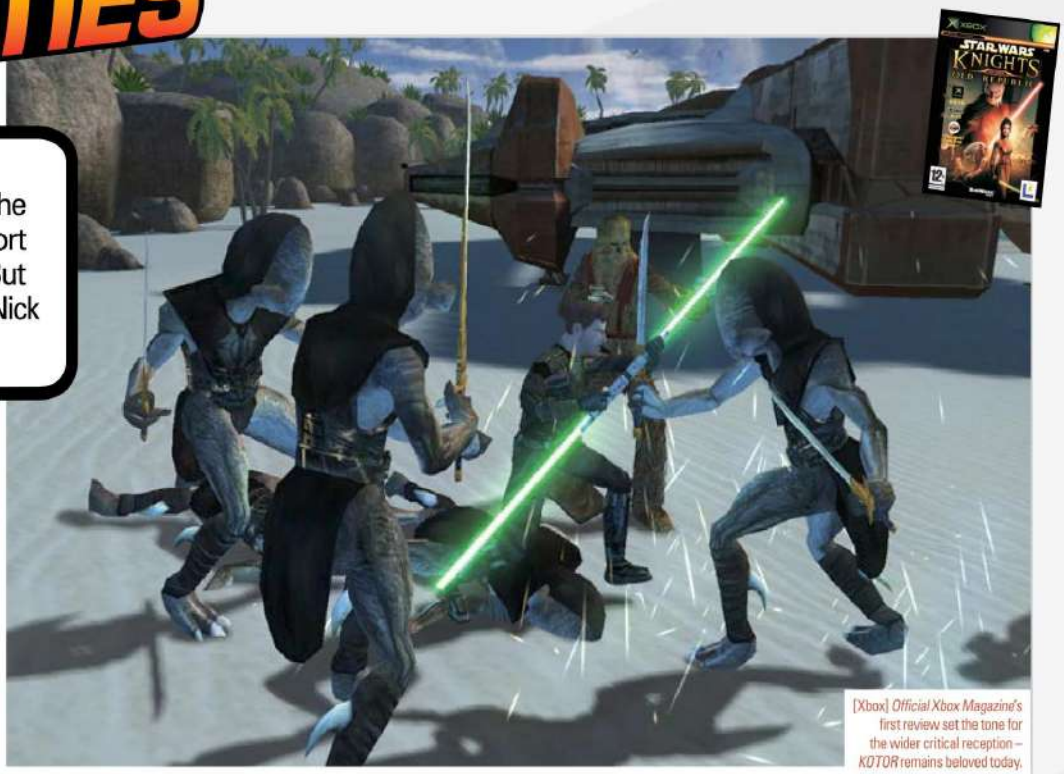
SEPTEMBER 2003 – With few major releases hitting the UK, magazines turn to import reviews to fill their pages. But will that be enough? Nick Thorpe finds out...

NEWS SEPTEMBER 2003

The Netherlands began allowing doctors to issue prescriptions for cannabis on 1 September, with the aim of providing pain relief for patients suffering from cancer and other conditions. The drug, while tolerated for sale through licensed shops only, was still technically illegal in the country and remains so today.

On 5 September the chief executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, announced the withdrawal of the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill 2003. This bill was introduced in February 2003, and had been intended to fulfil Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, which requires the Hong Kong government to pass a national security law. Opponents of the bill had been concerned over curbs on freedom to criticise the government, the proposal to give police rights to enter residential properties without a warrant, and the broad international application of the bill. At present, China is still attempting to spread its influence over Hong Kong.

The Swedish minister for foreign affairs, Anna Lindh, was stabbed while shopping in a Stockholm department store on 10 September. Despite nine hours of surgery and transfusions, she was unable to recover and died on 11 September. On 24 September, 24-year-old Mijailo Mijailovi was arrested in connection with the murder. He eventually confessed in January 2004 and was found guilty at trial, receiving a life sentence that he is still serving today. In 2011, the murderer claimed to have committed the crime due to a hatred of all politicians, due to belief that his situation was hopeless.



[Xbox] *Official Xbox Magazine*'s first review set the tone for the wider critical reception – *KOTOR* remains beloved today.

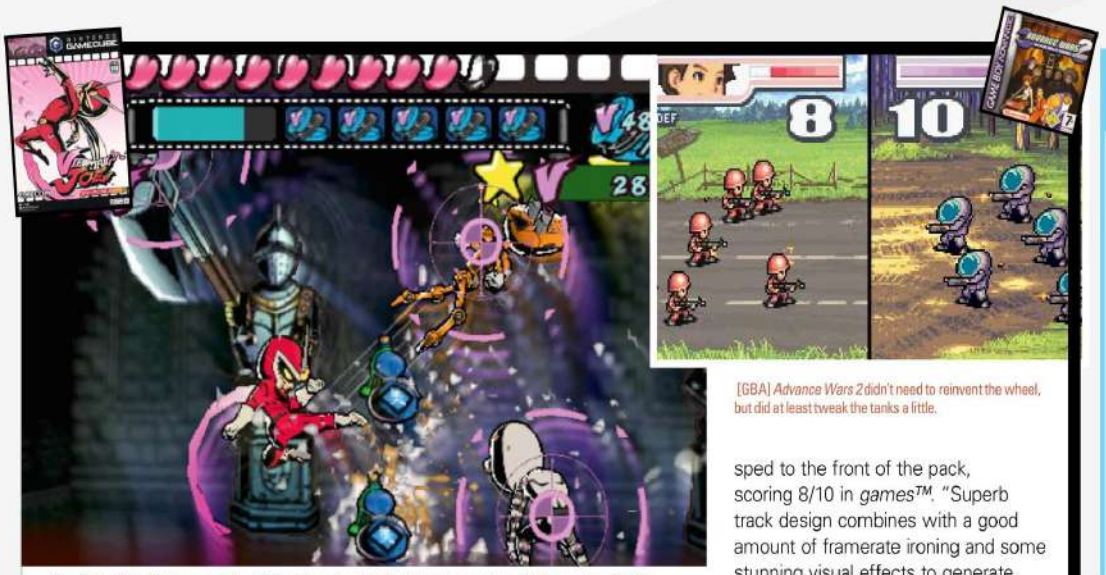
THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2003

Who had the big UK release of the month? Why, that would be LucasArts, with *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* – and the *Official Xbox Magazine* had the exclusive review. BioWare's licensed RPG scored a whopping 9.5/10 in *OXM*, which felt that it was "as significant as *Halo*". The reviewer loved the freedom of choice afforded to the player, stating that you would "soon become deeply attached to your character", and also enjoyed the freedom to choose your pace of battle, from traditional turn-based to much more action-oriented speeds. It's a good job that it was good too, because the other major Xbox exclusive of the month, *Dino Crisis 3*, was not. *Edge* awarded the space-based survival horror 3/10, saying that it "fails in practically every sense, from fine detail to basic tenets". Similarly disappointed, *games™* scored the game 4/10 and reserved special condemnation for the "soul-destroying camera".

What would other magazines do without the big UK release this month? Could they perhaps find a smorgasbord of lower profile games that could generate some buzz together? The answer, as you've probably guessed, is no. As a result, Capcom's latest GameCube game *Viewtiful Joe* secured prominent reviews in *Edge*, *games™* and *NGC*, despite only being out in Japan. The debut of the company's new Clover Studio division drew from Japanese tokusatsu shows to deliver a supremely stylish cel-shaded beat-'em-up. *NGC* felt that it was difficult but sufficiently innovative to warrant a 90% score. *Edge*, awarding the game 8/10, felt that its bosses best exemplified its key qualities – "aesthetic magnificence and structural intricacy" as well as "unremitting cruelty". *Viewtiful Joe* also scored 8/10 in *games™*, which felt that it was "verging on masterpiece status" but noted that "certain sections do manage to simply stop being fun". UK GameCube owners were treated to *Mega Man: Network Transmission*, a 2.5D platformer that attempted to integrate aspects of the *Mega Man Battle Network* series with mixed results. *NGC* described it as "really *basic*" in a 59% review, while *Edge* scored it 4/10 and complained that "*Mega Man*'s structure is as rigid as his body".

[GameCube] *XGRA* is XGR8. You know, because it's 'great' and scored 8? Ugh, philistines.

[PS2] If you enjoyed being a bloodsucking pest but hadn't already gone into politics, *Ka 2* was the game for you.



[GameCube] *Viewtiful Joe* was only available in Japan by this point, but at least you knew it'd be worth waiting for.

[GBA] *Advance Wars 2* didn't need to reinvent the wheel, but did at least tweak the tanks a little.

The PS2 was given an eclectic sack of mystery treats this month, with imports once again found in abundance. Sega's draft-crazy arcade conversion *Initial D: Special Stage* scored 5/10 in *Edge* and 6/10 in *games™*, with the latter feeling that "unsophisticated handling" and a "potentially nauseating Tokyopop soundtrack" let it down. *Mr Moskeeto*'s sequel *Ka 2: Let's Go To Hawaii* earned 7/10 from *Edge*, which found the blood-sucking action to be "technically scrappy but lovingly constructed". *Suikoden III*, the latest in Konami's RPG series, attempted to move the series into 3D with questionable results – in a 6/10 review, *Edge* proclaimed the battle system to be "a real backwards step" that was "easily the weakest portion of the game".

Fortunately for Game Boy Advance owners, a stone-cold classic was on the schedule for the month, with *Advance Wars 2* getting a UK release and earning plenty of critical praise. *NGC* considered it to be "demonstrably better than the first *Advance Wars*" due to its inclusion of new terrain, new commanding officers and a two-tier system of special powers. Its 93% score was a bit more effusive than *Edge*'s 8/10. *Edge* considered the original game "the closest the format has to perfection", and lamented that the designers faced a choice between challenging experienced fans and maintaining accessibility. Judging that Intelligent Systems had opted for the latter, *Edge* felt that *Advance Wars 2* was "only close to perfection for those who've never experienced perfection before". Handheld fans would have been less pleased to see weak interpretations of Dreamcast favourites arriving this month. *Edge* awarded *Jet Set Radio* 4/10, noting that it was "not a lazy port" but that the levels were too intricate for isometric presentation. In *games™*, *Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack* scored 3/10 and was described as "a victim of its own ambition".

All that remains is to root around in the barrel of multiformat releases, and *XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association* sped to the front of the pack, scoring 8/10 in *games™*. "Superb track design combines with a good amount of framerate ironing and some stunning visual effects to generate the mind-blowing speeds that make *XGRA* such an inarguably entertaining ride," said the reviewer. *The Great Escape* divided opinions – *Edge* gave it 4/10, describing it as "surprisingly varied" but lamenting the "disjointed, constrained feel" as compared to the more open-ended Eighties home computer game. "Flawed combat" was chief amongst the concerns of the *Official Xbox Magazine*, which nevertheless scored the game 7.6/10 for possessing "verve, guile and charisma, and [...] that infamous Steve McQueen motorbike chase". Meanwhile, licensed platformer *Futurama* was about as appealing as an invitation to Zapp Brannigan's private quarters. "The controls feel too clunky, the camera makes it impossible at times to see where you're supposed to be going and the cel-shading, while appropriate, looks quite nasty," complained *games™*. The reviewer concluded that it was "a typical example of another popular licence being wasted on a sub-par game", and awarded it 3/10.

Join us again next time, when we'll feature fewer incorrect assessments of *Initial D*'s music. ✱

CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 2003

ALL FORMATS – UK

1 – Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness (Eidos)
2 – EyeToy: Play (Sony)
3 – Enter The Matrix (Atari)
4 – SOCOM: US Navy Seals (Sony)
5 – Hulk (Vivendi)

ALL FORMATS – USA

1 – Hulk (Vivendi)
2 – Enter The Matrix (Atari)
3 – Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness (Eidos)
4 – Midnight Club II (Rockstar)
5 – NBA Street Vol 2 (EA)

ALL FORMATS – JAPAN

1 – Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3 (Nintendo)
2 – Kirby's Air Ride (Nintendo)
3 – Mother 1+2 (Nintendo)
4 – Silent Hill 3 (Konami)
5 – Animal Forest e+ (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1 – Where Is The Love (Black Eyed Peas)
2 – White Flag (Dido)
3 – Sunshine (Gareth Gates)
4 – Baby Boy (Big Brovaz)
5 – Are You Ready For Love (Elton John)

THIS MONTH IN...

games™

"Sales of GameCube software fell short in NA and Europe last year, and I believe that's due to the popularity of violent games on other consoles," says Nintendo's Hiroshi Yamauchi. "That's why it's hard to achieve success in [the west] for Japanese developers, even the most talented ones." We're not buying that logic, either.

Edge

"The problem with [the Wachowskis'] effort was not their creative ability (or lack of it) but perhaps because they were all too familiar with videogame mores, resulting in *Enter The Matrix* being generic to the point of self parody," writes Paul Drury, who wants to see the Coen brothers making games. Wait... Paul Drury!?

OXM

In its The Battle For Japan feature, *OXM* looks at Japan-only Xbox games like *Bistro Cupid* and *Thousand Land*, and chronicles its miserable first year in the country. The article ends by predicting that Microsoft "could be the first western hardware company in nearly 20 years to find long-term success [...] without conquering Japan".

Tom & Jerry

MOUSE IN THE HOUSE

» NES » 1991 » SOFTWARE CREATIONS

Just about every retro gamer has a tale of extreme good fortune, and mine concerns the special Nintendo bag I got at a charity shop in 2007. The American SNES with a couple of carts was exciting, but I knew that the NES-101 was a real find. As I dug further through that sack full of stuff, I couldn't believe what I was seeing – *Super Mario Bros 3, Contra, Metroid, Ninja Gaiden, DuckTales* and more. None of it was boxed, but this was a ready-made collection with most of the best stuff. I've had dreams about retro gaming finds that didn't match up to the reality of this one.

CJ – the previous owner, whose name was on the back of the carts in permanent marker – clearly had great taste, but everyone has the odd clunker in their collection and I was convinced that I'd found it when I happened across *Tom & Jerry*. Despite the fact that the licence seems like it would make for some great games, I'd been burned before by *Tom & Jerry: The Movie* for the Master System and I'd never heard anything good about the NES game. But my preconceptions proved to be unfounded, as *Tom & Jerry* proved to be non-dreadful, and in fact an entirely serviceable platformer.

Part of the reason that the NES game comes off better is that it feels considerably more responsive and gives you much more freedom to explore, but another major factor is that it simply seems that the developers understood their source material far better. I don't want to play as Tom, chasing Jerry through obstacle courses while he lobs land mines at me – I want to play as Jerry, leaping around oversized environments and picking up invisible ink for temporary invincibility.

The *Tom & Jerry* NES game won't be hitting any top ten lists – probably not even top 50 – but it's not the bad game I thought it would be. What's more, it proved to be an important reminder that if I leave my assumptions unchallenged, they could potentially cause me to overlook something I might really enjoy. ✱

THE HISTORY OF TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

AS A FRANCHISE, THIS SKATEBOARDING SERIES ELEVATED TONY HAWK, NEVERSOFT AND EVEN THE SUBCULTURE OF SKATING TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF RECOGNITION. WITH THE ORIGINAL PRO SKATER GAMES BEING REMASTERED, WE EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF ONE OF GAMING'S MOST INFLUENTIAL BRANDS

Have you seen Tony Hawk recently? Not just out and about buying his groceries, but instead rocking his deck, riding a half pipe and trying to slam that infamous 900? With the helmet on and all that vertical air, it's impossible to spot the difference between then and now, between the Birdman many of us will recognise from the late Nineties and the here-and-now 2020 version. There may be wrinkles around his eyes and silver streaks in his hair, but age hasn't stopped this public figure from doing what people love to see him do. That's kind of the feeling surrounding the games his name has been attached to as well, and if the excitement surrounding the release of the remasters for the original two *Pro Skater* games has proven anything, it's that there's both a great thirst for some classic *Tony Hawk* gaming and clear evidence that some games can age like wine, not cheese.

Of course Tony Hawk wasn't always associated with the brand. First came Activision, a then-little-known developer called Neversoft and a PlayStation rendition of Bruce Willis. "We were working on this *Big Guns* game for Sony, but that got cancelled and Neversoft nearly collapsed," says Mick West, one of the three cofounders of the studio. "The company was running out of money, we had something like 12 people on staff – but then we hooked up with Activision, and they gave us *Apocalypse* [a third-person shooter featuring the *Die Hard* star]." All that Activision wanted was a movie tie-in out for Christmas, but Neversoft did such a good job of it that Activision offered the studio some additional work on a new title. "The original concept was that Activision had decided there was a hole in the market for a skateboarding game," Mick explains, "and so the idea was to do… a skateboarding game." Neither Neversoft nor Activision had any real "idea of what that would actually be", and so the team set about trying to figure out exactly what form such a game should take and what would make it fun. "So we built a prototype in the *Apocalypse* engine with Bruce Willis skating around on a skateboard."

There wasn't really any guidance from Activision, and early on in its development obviously Tony Hawk wasn't tied to the project. "It was just called '*The Skateboarding Game*'," recalls Mick, "and internally for a long time we referred to it as '*Skate*' because that was the name we used in the source control system." Initially, the design was akin to Sega's *Top Skater*, but Neversoft noted that people were having more fun tricking around in the half pipes or off ramps in the first level than actually racing to the finish line, inspiring the focus on tricks and combos that the franchise introduced. "We started making more things like that, it just kind of grew organically," remembers Mick. Some of the arcade elements remained, such as the time limit and score-attack-style mode, but from there objectives would enter into the mix and *Pro Skater* was born. ▶

> **"ACTIVISION DECIDED THERE WAS A HOLE IN THE MARKET FOR A SKATEBOARDING GAME... SO WE BUILT A PROTOTYPE WITH BRUCE WILLIS ON A SKATEBOARD"**
> Mick West

MICK WEST

Mick was one of Neversoft's cofounders. Today, he works to debunk pseudoscientific claims, such as UFOs and chemtrails.

BARRY MORALES

Barry is senior producer at Vicarious Visions, the development studio behind the new *Pro Skater* remakes.

ALAN FLORES

Alan joined the series at a time when the team was pivoting to the more powerful PlayStation 2.

But it wasn't until Tony Hawk got on board (heh…) that Neversoft knew that Activision saw potential in the title. "When they started signing people up, these skaters like Tony Hawk, Bob Burnquist, Eric Koston – famous people – that just showed that Activision was committing to it," Mick says. The addition of licensed music proved "Activision had its machine behind it," and this added legal effort and extra spend didn't just add a sense of confidence to the team. Ultimately, this meant a more relatable and honest experience. Skateboarding at the time wasn't nearly as pervasive as it is today, but throughout the Nineties its own subculture was only just forming, one that epitomised an attitude but also found roots in music, fashion and language. Activision helped to import a lot of this into the game, but Neversoft focused hard on figuring out exactly what skater culture could mean for the game. "We spent a lot of time at the start of the project watching skate videos," says Mick, "and this was really the thing that defined the game. There were loads of skate videos back then, we were watching them on VHS tapes. Every lunchtime we'd watch an hour of skate videos, we'd just immerse ourselves in the skate culture and see what the types of things that people liked to do." You could argue that for all the efforts in creating thoroughly compelling gameplay to run smoothly, it was actually the way that skater culture was so well-infused into the game that made the title such a success. And it was: releasing first on the PlayStation in 1999 and then on N64 and Dreamcast in 2000, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* (*Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* in the UK) was met with immediate success.

So began one of the most iconic franchises in gaming, one that not only helped to propel Tony Hawk and skater culture into the limelight, but one that gave Neversoft a great deal of recognition – if not for the game itself, then for the fun, unlockable videos the studio included in the game. For a long time Neversoft would become *the* skateboarding game studio, especially once the success of *THPS* was fully realised. "Some of the team were skaters, the artists especially," recalls Mick of Neversoft's initial attitude towards skating. "Joel Jewett [Neversoft cofounder] got really into it, he ended up building a half pipe in his backyard, and some of the artists were previously skateboarders." The decision to make a sequel was made even before the original was released, and knowing that a sequel would be needed did impact the way the studio would grow. "Some of the people that we hired for the next games afterwards," adds Mick, "if they could skate then that was actually an advantage and it helped them to get hired."

» [PlayStation] Discovering each level's gaps within just two minutes was all part of the exploratory fun of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*.

"WHEN THEY STARTED SIGNING PEOPLE UP, THESE SKATERS LIKE TONY HAWK, BOB BURNQUIST, ERIC KOSTON - FAMOUS PEOPLE - THAT JUST SHOWED THAT ACTIVISION WAS COMMITTING TO IT"
Mick West

But when it came to the sequel, Neversoft was actually quite tentative, despite the confidence it had behind the game. "The budget went up and we hired more people, but not a huge amount was different between the first and the second game," says Mick. "Because we didn't at the time know just how much of a big thing it was going to be, we actually split the company into two teams: one would work on the *Spider-Man* game and the other would work on *Tony Hawk's 2*." The benefit was that the engine was already in place, so it was easier to create new content and add in new parts to the game within a yearly turnaround. The manual was the first addition, which was intended for the original but was cut due to time restraints, and enabled players to chain long combos together around each map. "It was almost like an easier game to make in a way, because in the first

DEFINING LEVELS

WHAT STAGES WERE WORTH TAKING A TUMBLE IN?

WAREHOUSE

This drab old warehouse may not be the best level in the *Tony Hawk's* series, but it's absolutely iconic. That first roll down into the basin, shattering the glass cabin above the half pipe or gapping the taxi cab for the first time: it's all ingrained into the minds of any *THPS* player.

SCHOOL II

While the original's School level was a solid contender, *THPS2* took the format and just perfected it. This was one of those rare levels that just kept on unfurling the more you played: extra places to score quick points, tantalising hidden areas and a setting that felt like home for any skater.

ALCATRAZ

By the time the fourth *Pro Skater* rolled around, Neversoft knew what made a great level. The PS2 hardware enabled a huge variety of locales, but Alcatraz was one of the more memorable. It was a self-contained combo heaven, built for pro skaters to work at unveiling its potential.

DOWNTOWN

Though the original game also featured a similar urban map, Streets, it was Downtown that set a precedent for the direction the series would go. Skaters tend to see their urban landscapes differently, and Downtown, with its hidden flexibility and depth, enabled that in *THPS* players, too.

[PlayStation] How many young minds have built superhuman memories thanks to the need to track which tricks were already used in a single *THPS* run?

[Xbox] *THPS2X* was an Xbox exclusive with improved visuals, *THPS*'s career mode, five new stages, and system link support for up to eight players.

[PS2] The switch to PS2 meant better visuals and larger environments, but it didn't change the core experience all that much.

[PlayStation] The PlayStation version of *THPS3* featured the same levels, but with much less visual flair and changed objectives to fit within hardware limitations.

[PlayStation] Multiplayer sessions of HORSE or Graffiti are still indisputably some of the best split-screen experiences available.

[PS2] *Pro Skater 3* drove the series towards more irreverent objectives, playing to that sense of exploration within each new level.

VENICE

Based on a real-world location called The Pit in Venice Beach, California – and even featuring a gap created by Chad Muska – Venice was a challenging level that really made players make the most of its quirky intricacies. It also introduced long-standing favourite NPC Ollie The Magic Bum.

CANADA

For fairly obvious reasons, the outdoor areas in *Tony Hawk's* games rarely gave much pleasure until the opportunity to de-board was an option. Canada from *THPS3*, however, was a rare exception – an impressive level that could theoretically be comboed in a circuit... if you practiced enough.

KONA

The extra power of the PS2 and a better engine in *THPS4* ultimately led to a great number of levels in the fourth iteration, but the recreation of real-world Kona – and its well-known snake slalom – felt like the game was offering players a toolset of options. It really was a sandbox for combo creation.

SKATE HEAVEN

Skate Heaven is something all players strove to reach. Though quirky (it appears to float in space), the concept is an amalgamation of some of the best skate spots, replete with a volcano for a sneaky hidden skate park within the map. Tony Hawk's house is also featured in this stage.

BUILD THE ULTIMATE SKATE PARK

HOW TO MAKE A KILLER CUSTOM STAGE

1 This is perhaps an unnecessarily tricky place to gap into the half pipe beyond the steps, but what is a custom skate park without a pointlessly difficult gap to aim for?

2 Successfully pulling off a long and elaborate rail-riding route is hugely satisfying, so incorporating one that utilises other pieces (like railed quarter pipes) is a must for any level

3 Kickers are essential ways to start great combos, but the spacing needs a lot of trial and error. It's easy to assume you'll make the gap from the editor's isometric view.

4 Climbing a high point while affixed to a skateboard is a rewarding feat, so why not create a nice relaxing space for your skater to survey the horizon.

5 Spikes. Because every good skate park needs an immediate and brutal way to die. Putting this here makes attempting the rail a 'win or bail' situation.

6 Though it might look simple, this bench here is actually trickier to land on than you might think. Make a gap out of this, and reward those who persist enough to succeed.

7 Propelling yourself out of a half pipe at full speed isn't the easiest thing to control in *THPS*, so if you create an opening reliant on this, make that gap easier as a satisfying, punctuating point on the skate line.

8 Behind here is the starting point of the long rail that runs through our skate park. It's important to playtest your park if you want your friends to take it seriously; you'll quickly learn what does and doesn't work.

9 Such a bowl isn't the most exciting feature of a skate park, but some *Tony Hawk's* players are only happy infinitely tricking inside or grinding around the edge of one of these. Sometimes you've gotta appeal to the masses.

10 Custom pools are so much more satisfying to add into your skate park than the premade ones, especially when it comes to devising novel ways of dropping in.

game we were learning so much new stuff. In the second one, we knew what a really fun skateboarding game was so we could just build on this really solid base and just knocked it out by Thanksgiving."

THPS2 released on PlayStation in September 2000 followed by Windows, Game Boy Color and Dreamcast with further ports arriving for Game Boy Advance, N64 and Mac a year later, and was met with unanimous praise. The series has had an erratic history on handheld devices, but its GBA versions – handled by Vicarious Visions – were widely considered to be a solid recreation of the *THPS* format despite their isometric viewpoint. The main PlayStation sequel, however, took the foundational gameplay laid down by the original and improved on it in ways that made sense to become the definitive *Tony Hawk's* game that every game afterwards would hold a kickflip to. Custom characters, refined level design and a level editor enhanced that core experience, but it was the addition of the aforementioned manuals and wall rides that enhanced the experience – adding to the palette from which the skater could choose to build a combo masterpiece. This was something Mick was especially proud of, having written a unique scripting language just for the trick system. "It was really simple in the first game, but in the second game I had made essentially a little language in assembly language that was specific for the trick system. This would allow you to do things like branch tricks based on various conditions."

> **"IN TONY HAWK'S 4 YOU CAN SEE A LOT MORE TEXTURES, DETAILS, MORE CHARACTERS AND THINGS LIKE THAT BECAUSE WE WROTE OUR OWN, MORE POWERFUL ENGINE THAN THE RENDERWARE ONE"**
> Mick West

At this point the series was already on track for a hall of fame nomination, but Neversoft didn't let up. A third game was due and again it was only going to have a year's turnaround. A simple task considering the improvements that *THPS2* managed in the same timeframe, right? "Well the third game was a huge change for us because we did it on the PlayStation 2," explains Mick. "Neversoft switched over entirely to PS2 development at that stage and completely dropped all the PlayStation stuff." Mick admits that this was a little bit of a setback for the team. "Now we suddenly had to learn all of this new stuff. Of course, we had started doing it before the end of *Tony Hawk's 2*, so we hired some programmers to work on the engine. We ended up licensing the RenderWare Engine to do it. So by the time we had finished *Tony Hawk's 2*, we had a little bit of stuff running on the PS2 but it was also very much a learning curve – it was a brand-new system for everyone."

And like so many developers around the turn of the millennium, Neversoft was growing. In part this was the success of the *Tony Hawk* series, but it was also partly a necessity to take on the growing demands of 3D game development. "I remember playing [the first] *Tony Hawk's* at the office just after I started," recalls Alan Flores, who started at Neversoft as level designer on the studio's *Spider-Man* game. "It was super hard for me, it was super frustrating, but I couldn't stop playing." Alan explains that the whole company moved over to *THPS3*, and the move to the next generation of hardware was an opportunity to make something special. "But for me, I had no idea how to make a skating level," he admits. "It was really a struggle. The first level I worked on was Suburbia, and I didn't really understand how to just put lines into it."

There was a larger scale to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*'s levels thanks to the PS2's extra hardware power and the game design had been solidified so there were no questions on that front, but there was one issue that was standing in the team's way. "One of the things I remember the most with the development then is that we had problems with RenderWare," says Mick. "They had a limitation in their engine where if you use a texture for one model, you couldn't reuse the same texture for a different model. So if you had a bunch of different cars, they all had to have completely unique textures which obviously limited the amount of models you could have." Mick points to how he had to spend time fixing bugs in the third-party engine just to get the game made, unable to avoid the "sparse" look of *Tony Hawk's 3*. "You can see that change between *Tony Hawk's 3* and *Tony Hawk's 4*. The third game looks kind of clean and sparse because there isn't that much detail,

» [GBA] Each new release came with an equivalent portable version, with the five GBA games all using the same isometric game design.

» [PS2] The industry's push towards open world gaming had a decisive impact on the *Tony Hawk's* franchise, but *THPS4* wasn't quite ready for that just yet.

PRETENDING I'M A SUPERMAN

SOUNDTRACKING PRO SKATER, AND OUR LIVES...

While skating and punk music have long been intertwined, there's no doubt that for those who picked up a board because of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* (this writer included), the music that accompanied each bail influenced a lot of formative years. Bands like Goldfinger, Bad Religion or Rage Against The Machine didn't just accompany the skating action, they soundtracked the lives of those that played the games. Should Powerman 5000's *When Worlds Collide* ever be played at a party, you just know that those that bellow its lyrics the most passionately are likely *Tony Hawk's* players.

As the series trundled on, each newly rendered kickflip was punctuated by the tracks that matched the skating subculture. The likes of Millencolin and The Dropkick Murphys became My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy and Green Day – the latter even getting featured in-game with *American Wasteland*. And when punk moved on, dying one of its countless, cyclical deaths, the games didn't discard the importance of music, with garage rock from The Black Keys or The Raconteurs interspersed alongside Anti-Flag, Royal Blood and Death From Above 1979.

It says a lot that one of the most important aspects of the reveal of the 2020 remaster was the songs that were to be included. Vicarious Visions had a challenge to replicate such a crucial part of the *THPS* experience. "Some of the companies that hold the rights to the music have changed or don't even exist anymore," admits Barry Morales of Vicarious Visions. "Nevertheless, we set out on a quest to get as many of the original songs as possible and I am happy to say we got pretty darn close."

> "IT JUST OPENED IT UP SO WE COULD WALK AROUND, INTERACT WITH PEOPLE AND HAVE A BIGGER AND MORE ARCHING STORY"
> ALAN FLORES

[PS2] A lot of the tasks in *Pro Skater 4* were silly and OTT, but that just added to the fun and arcade 'feel' that the franchise was about.

[PS2] The influence that the likes of *GTA* had on the franchise is especially noticeable in *American Wasteland*.

[Xbox 360] The addition of BMX biking was the 'big new feature' for *American Wasteland* and about as far as it could go for innovating.

there aren't these lavish textures everywhere. In *Tony Hawk's 4* you can see a lot more textures, details, more characters and things like that because we wrote our own, more powerful engine than the RenderWare one."

It was this pair of PlayStation 2 *Pro Skater* games that started to see a change in direction for the series, expanding the levels to incorporate larger environments, a more irreverent approach to the gameplay and a greater emphasis on the open world style of gameplay that was beginning to see prominence on the console. Neversoft was able to keep its hot streak going, with *THPS3* releasing in 2001 and *THPS4* in 2002 across the range of consoles, computers and GBA. Both were very well-received, but the former is considered the all-time greatest *Tony Hawk's* game. The addition of reverts – which added an option to trick out of a half pipe and into a manual for the ultimate combo chain – was the final part to complete the comboing picture. The fourth game was stellar, but everything since brought new features and fun but not necessarily improvements to that core experience.

By the time the pair of *Underground* games came around (2003 and 2004), it was already high time that the *Tony Hawk's* games did something different. Gaming had evolved a lot in that short space of time and the industry was moving away from the short, arcadey style of gameplay and instead into more narrative-based, story-driven designs. "It just opened it up so we could walk around, interact with people and have a bigger and more arching story," says Alan of the changes that came with *THUG*. "As developers, sometimes you do something for so long that you want to try something different."

But it wasn't just the storyline of the amateur-skater-made-good that arrived with *THUG*, because now players could – for the first time – dismount their board and explore on foot, shimmy along ledges and generally navigate the open world in a more free-form fashion. "It was fun in some sense because it opens it up a lot," says Alan. "You could put some stuff in areas that most people wouldn't be able to access just with the skateboard. But also it gives us the opportunity to sort of break the rules of skate lines."

[Xbox] The Natas Spin was the final addition to the series' trick repertoire, named after its creator Natas Kaupas who first 720'ed on a hydrant in 1989.

Though it was a fairly big change for the franchise and therefore opened it up for extra scrutiny, it was very well-received. *THUG* released in 2003 with a more irreverent sequel coming in 2004, both on PS2, Xbox and GameCube. Though the high of *THPS3* was never reached again, both were well-received – things were going well for the franchise and for Neversoft as a result. "That was the golden age of Neversoft," recalls Mick, "because we were seeing the game going to number one in the charts each time we released a game. It was a great feeling. We knew that we were making games that were successful, and we knew that for the first few games we were innovating with the series and making a better game. Not necessarily an entirely different game, but it had changes that were new and interesting. Everyone was pretty happy to be working on it, and a lot of people who came on the team were people who had played the first games and they wanted to work on *Tony Hawk* games." And as the game grew in popularity, so too did the opportunities afforded to the team, Mick explains. "We'd take a team of an artist and a level designer out on-location to see what the location looked like, take reference photos and then come back. I think we started to do that with *THPS3*, but later on we were sending people to Moscow and Hawaii and all kinds of places."

Though a number of notable developers have dipped their hands in *Tony Hawk* development with the various ports of the franchise – Treyarch, Vicarious Visions, Edge Of Reality, Beenox and more have all been tied to the ports – Neversoft wasn't quite ready to relinquish ownership of the game just yet. "What happened after *Underground* was done, we were going to split the company up and half of the company was going to work on *Gun*," explains Alan. "I started working on that. We loved the franchise but there was some brand fatigue, and we thought we would let the series rest for a year. But Activision, they like to put out yearly sequels, so they said they were going to give it to another developer. So then me and a couple of other guys went to Joel [Jewett] and said, 'Forget that man, we can't give *Tony Hawk* away, that's our game, we wanna do it.' We couldn't stand the idea – especially that *Tony*

[DS] *American Sk8land* is the DS version of *THAW*, and it's a decent port. The touchscreen can be used to create skateboard deck art.

[Xbox 360] The annual release cycle of *Tony Hawk's* games created a certain amount of brand fatigue that Neversoft just couldn't combat.

[Wii] The limitations of motion control meant *Downhill Jam* was designed more like *SSX* than a true *Tony Hawk* game.

CAMEO CHARACTERS

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL ROSTER ADDITIONS

NEVERSOFT EYEBALL

APPEARS IN:
THPS3

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Complete the game with every character, including collecting three gold medals.

SPIDER-MAN

APPEARS IN:
THPS2

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Achieve 100% in Career Mode with a created skater to unlock the Webhead.

MICK WEST

APPEARS IN:
THPS2

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Enter a cheat code at the main menu, then use MICK WEST as your skater's name.

OLLIE THE MAGIC BUM

APPEARS IN:
THPS3

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Complete all goals in the game and get all three gold medals in Career Mode seven times.

DARTH MAUL

APPEARS IN:
THPS3

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Complete all 54 goals and get all gold medals as Tony Hawk. Or enter YOHOMIES in as a cheat code.

OFFICER DICK

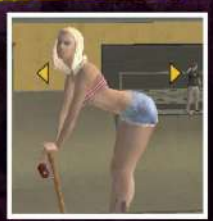
APPEARS IN:
THPS1-4

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Depends on the game, but usually collecting all skate tapes with a single character or 100%-ing the game.

DAISY

APPEARS IN:
THPS4

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Earn $100,000 and complete all gaps... or enter (o)(o) as a cheat code. Err, yeah...



EDDIE

APPEARS IN:
THPS4

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Purchase him as a bonus playable character from the store.

MAT HOFFMAN

APPEARS IN:
THAW

HOW TO UNLOCK:
Beat the game on Classic Mode on Sick difficulty to unlock this BMX superstar.

RE-ENGINEERING THE BIRDMAN

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE THPS REMASTERS

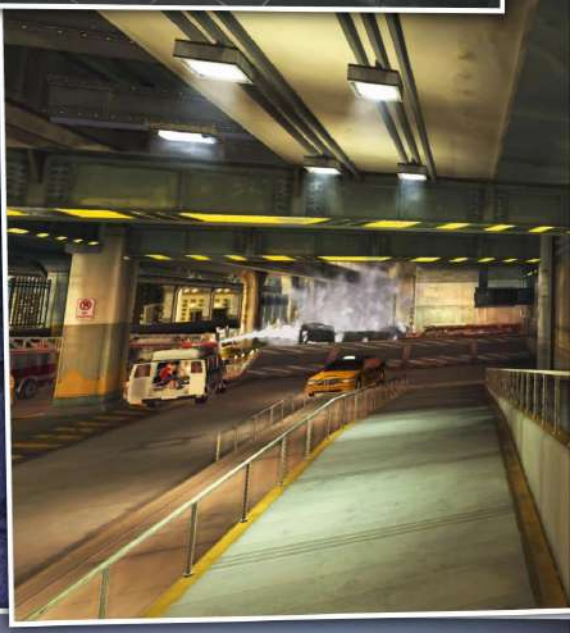
These days it's hard to get excited about yet another remaster when a new one is seemingly announced every week, but Activision's reveal of a complete rework of the original PlayStation *Pro Skater* games was met with unanimous outcries of delight. "For me, I was a teenager when the first games came out and I remember getting together with my friends and sister to play it after school almost every day," says Barry Morales, senior producer at Vicarious Visions – the studio behind the remaster. "To be on the other side of it now, developing this remaster for a whole new generation of players is an amazing experience and I am pretty stoked for it to be released."

There's every reason for us to be stoked, too. Vicarious Visions is a developer with merit, not just because the developer was involved with *Tony Hawk's* games in the past, but it has experience handling exactly this kind of project. "How to develop a game for a modern audience is an important thing you need to consider when creating a remaster," says Barry, "and luckily our experience working on the *Crash Bandicoot N Sane Trilogy* a couple of years ago helped with this. The one thing that we felt that was the most important thing to keep the same was the map layouts. The maps from the original *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* and *Pro Skater 2* were so iconic that we did not want to mess with that."

The studio's history with Activision meant it was able to get hold of the original code that Neversoft used, which gave the team a good base to start from, and helped to retain the way skaters handled in the PlayStation games. "There is something about how the original games felt that was so right and we did not want to lose that in creating this remaster," highlights Barry.

That's not to say there aren't elements of modernisation here and there, with Barry pointing to a new progression system to incorporate both *THPS* and *THPS2* into a single release. "We wanted to update this system to have a bit more crossover between the two tours. We felt it was important to have a system of challenges that would bridge both games to keep players engaged." And while new skaters will be dropping in, the returning skaters will appear as their current, decidedly more aged versions – albeit with a little bit of "Hollywood magic", as Barry suggests. This mentality carried over to the visuals, too, which retain the feel of the original levels with the "realism that you would expect with triple-A titles today".

[Xbox 360] This carefully staged marketing shot perhaps best highlights why *Tony Hawk's Ride* didn't land its gimmicky trick.



[Xbox One] In a different timeline perhaps *Pro Skater 5* could've been a stellar return to form for the franchise...

[PS4] Despite the modern look, Vicarious Visions has worked hard to retain the feel of the PlayStation games by utilising the original code.

"GOING FROM A TEENAGER PLAYING THE ORIGINALS TO A DEVELOPER WORKING ON THE REMASTER, IT'S A PRETTY SPECIAL EXPERIENCE – IT'S BEEN AN HONOUR FOR ME"
BARRY MORALES

Hawk had been in Neversoft for so long." The result was *American Wasteland*, and despite the enthusiasm given to it by the team, Alan admits it was a gruelling task. "We had spent a couple of months on *Gun*, we still had the yearly cycle, *Underground* was a big hit. We needed to figure out how to make a game in a little bit less time that could still hold up to *THUG*." The only way to handle this was with a looser title, one that was more akin to traditional *Tony Hawk's* gameplay but with crazier challenges and more freedom. Open world streaming technology was the big feature, though an interim solution ("You know, we're a yearly franchise," points out Alan) of long tunnels connecting the different areas was necessary. The short turnaround had an effect, of course, but it was still fairly well-received. But perhaps more importantly, it solidified the franchise's switch to more over-the-top and frivolous objectives, too, which practically every game afterwards followed.

American Wasteland released in 2005 for PS2, GameCube, Xbox and Xbox 360, while Neversoft would still work on follow ups with *Project 8* and *Proving Ground* for Xbox 360 and PS3 in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Though a Wii release attempted to do something different with motion control in *Downhill Jam*, it wasn't especially well-thought-out, and the general lack of freshness and innovation in the series ultimately meant its appeal began to dwindle. Sales were still stable, but like so many old-school franchises transitioning to a more serious era of gaming with the PS3 and Xbox 360, it was a challenge to pull in the annual audience in the face of so many drastic changes to gamer habits and interests. Alan admits that the team "were always worried about figuring out what it is the fans wanted for the next game" while still creating a game the studio could be happy with. "There's a lot of people that will stand up and say they love your game, but there are a lot more people who will come up and say, 'You guys are idiots, this is horrible.' There's always a ton of pressure." *Proving Ground* was particularly notable for such reasons. It arrived only a month after EA had decided it would grind into the genre with *Skate*, which introduced tricking with the analogue stick and was seen as innovative in ways that the *Tony Hawk's* games hadn't been for years. This made *Proving Ground*'s decision to return to an arcade style seem all the more ancient.

Things needed to change, but with Neversoft shifting its focus to *Guitar Hero* and about ready to let go of skateboarding, Activision needed to look for another developer to take on the mantle of *Tony Hawk* game development. But Neversoft's impact had inadvertently had an effect here, too, with the next non-mobile game in the series being *Tony Hawk: Ride*, releasing in 2009 on PS3, Xbox 360 and Wii. Much like the addictively clicky plastic peripherals of Neversoft's *Guitar Hero*, Activision and its enlisted developer Robomodo had decided that the best way to innovate on a tried-and-true genre was to add its own misguided novelty controller: thus *Ride* was born, which had players standing atop a 'skateboard' and having to physically hop for ollies or reach to the board for grab tricks. Activision had once termed it a necessary "breakthrough" for the series when pitching it to investors, but for gamers the release oozed cynicism from the start – and it obviously bombed. The money spent on such an expensive investment wasn't to be wasted, however, and so *Tony Hawk: Shred* released a year later, adding in snowboarding of all things to the gimmicky controller. In its first week *Shred* sold an embarrassing 3,000 copies in North America, and caused Activision to put the franchise on hiatus.

This effectively meant no 'new' release in the franchise besides a botched downloadable-only *Pro Skater HD* in 2012 that disappointed series fans and baffled newcomers and a pair of smartphone releases with *Shred Session* (2014) and *Skate Jam* (2018) – both of which, as you might expect, didn't amount to much. Robomodo did have one final shot in 2015, but the developer was not given a fair chance to do the legendary franchise justice. Though it was never officially confirmed, Activision's licensing agreement with Tony Hawk was due to end in 2015 and so Robomodo had only a few months to produce the first *Pro Skater* successor for 13 years. The title retained the arcadey gameplay of its *THPS* stablemates, but it was nothing short of a disaster with bugged gameplay, graphics on Xbox One and PS4 that were worse than the PS2 equivalents and none of the quality the brand had once epitomised. Unsurprisingly, Robomodo closed shortly after its release.

Luckily, these latter years can be something of a lesson for Activision and Vicarious Visions, which once again finds itself working on *Pro Skater*. This time as the lead developer of the series, VV is leveraging its respectable experience bringing a beloved PlayStation classic into the modern era with the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1+2 Remaster*. "Skating epic lines, dope music, and trying to one up your friends is what hooked me," says Barry Morales, senior producer at Vicarious Visions. "As a fan of the original games, I believe these games remain popular because they had the whole package," he adds, highlighting how the team now has the chance to introduce "a whole new generation" to that addictive gameplay. "Going from a teenager playing the originals to a developer working on the remaster, it's a pretty special experience – it's been an honour for me." And who knows, if it manages to varial heelflip the franchise back into relevance, maybe we'll even see a brand-new Birdman release in the future. It worked for *Crash Bandicoot*, after all... ✱

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THE MAKING OF
SCUBA DIVE

The compulsion to discover and explore has long been a key aspect of mankind, and since the dawn of videogames it has continued in pixelated form. This is the story of one such splendid example, Durell's pacifist underwater voyage that continues to captivate gamers today

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** DURELL SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** MIKE RICHARDSON
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Based in Taunton, Somerset, Durell Software was one of the core developers – on the ZX Spectrum in particular – that drove the UK games scene in the early Eighties. Formed by Robert White in 1982 with just £100 capital, the company had hit the ground running with the fantastic shoot-'em-up *Harrier Attack* and the jovial tropical platform game *Jungle Trouble*. By 1983, it was ready to move up into the lofty heights of 48K, and beyond. "We'd just finished *Harrier Attack*, which harked back to [arcade game] *Scramble*" begins Robert, "and we were looking for the next step. It was my outline suggestion and the underwater scenario seemed fun, plus I wasn't aware of anything graphically similar at the time." Working closely with Durell – although technically freelance – was coder Mike Richardson, who takes up the story of how *Scuba Dive* came about. "Robert wanted a game that was like *Frogger* and we had a few hours of discussion at Durell's offices along with Ron Jeffs, and probably others." While Mike is very far from a fan of diving himself ("I have a fear of drowning, and can't swim more than a few metres," he admits), the idea of a subaquatic adventure took hold as both he and Ron – Durell's in-house programmer – left to develop the game separately, with the original outline as discussed with Robert. "Mike, as always, took the idea many leaps forwards, so that it ended up looking more like an aquarium than a computer game," Robert says. "When you work with someone as talented as him, there's not a lot of point tying them down; I just lit the blue touchpaper and watched him go."

While the Spectrum coder has no love of actually being in the water, sitting on it is a perfectly acceptable pastime. "I do love water, fishing and boats," says Mike, "and I used to go fishing as a teenager." The sport served Mike well when it came to designing

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

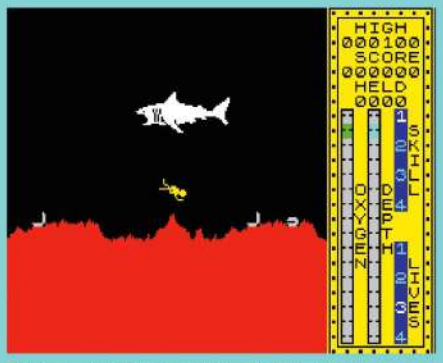
HARRIER ATTACK
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1983

THANATOS
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

TURBO ESPRIT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

» *Scuba Dive*'s ZX Spectrum programmer, Mike Richardson.

» [Oric] Exploring the verdant caves of the Oric version of *Scuba Dive*.



» [ZX Spectrum] Just like the smash hit *Jaws*, *Scuba Dive* taps into our inherent fear of sharks

» [C64] Losing a life in the C64 game sees your stricken diver sink to the seabed, only to be carried off by an agile octopus.

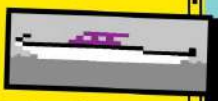
THE BOAT YARD

The three versions of *Scuba Dive* boast a trio of different vessels from which to plunge into the sea. Which is your favourite?

ZX SPECTRUM

Sleek and speedy-looking, the Spectrum boat is big enough for three divers to sit, waiting to jump off into the big blue.

COMMODORE 64



Looking more like a luxury yacht than a diving boat, the Commodore 64 has this rather long and featureless ship.

ORIC

Meanwhile, poor Oric divers get little more than a wooden dinghy – but at least it has a useful ladder!

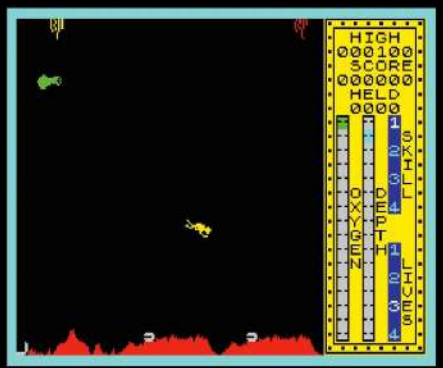
Scuba Dive. "I had a general idea of fish shapes and movement, and with no internet, used books that we had around the house as a reference." And maybe the odd blockbuster movie? "I had seen *Jaws* many times in the cinema," smiles Mike. "So, when I was creating the large sharks, I definitely had that in mind." When the player is being hunted by the game's menacing great white, it's impossible not to recall the famous Steven Spielberg blockbuster.

Scuba Dive begins with the brave diver perched on the side of a small boat, ready to plunge into the inky depths below. Underneath the waves lies treasure to be discovered and recovered, but unfortunately that's not all that's awaiting this intrepid explorer. Denizens of the sea, ranging from pulsing electric eels to huge sharks and deadly jellyfish are everywhere. Plus, of course, that ominous tentacled guardian of the caves that the diver must slip past in order to acquire the most valuable booty. "With the octopus, I was probably imagining *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*, while the jellyfish came from an article in an encyclopaedia that I had at school, about the Portuguese man o' war," Mike explains. Without the pages of reference material at a touch of a button that we have today, Mike spent hours designing the game's graphics on graph paper, converting it to hex, typing it all in and seeing what worked best on the Spectrum's limited palette. With the gameplay design, the idea was that the diver would be able the defend themselves against the creatures of the deep. Robert White, or rather Mrs White, had other ideas. "How the game looked and played was all left down to Mike," says Robert, "although I had envisaged that there would be some sort of harpoon gun. My wife insisted, ▶

> "I HAD A GENERAL IDEA OF FISH SHAPES AND MOVEMENT, AND WITH NO INTERNET, USED BOOKS THAT WE HAD AROUND THE HOUSE AS A REFERENCE"
> MIKE RICHARDSON

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSIONS SANK AND WHICH SWAM?



ZX SPECTRUM

■ The original version, and the game that stands out as a classic on the Sinclair computer. With its tight and sharp rotational control, fantastic underwater creatures and randomly generated levels, it's a pure pleasure exploring the seabed and craggy caverns of *Scuba Dive*. With a constant eye needed on the dwindling air supply, there's always plenty of tension as the player balances exploration against survival. Plus, of course, the booty. Arrr!

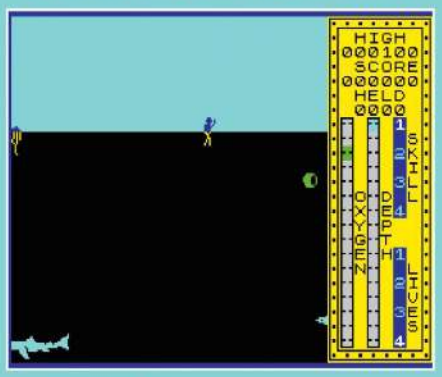
COMMODORE 64

■ With *Harrier Attack*'s 6502 processor expert tempted away to the automobile industry, a new coder was brought in by Durell to handle the C64 conversion. Regrettably, it eschews many of the elements that made the original so mesmeric, with unwieldy controls, chunky graphics and exasperating gameplay adding up to a deeply unsatisfying experience. Mix in some odd design and a confusing, frustrating start screen and you're better off staying on the boat.

ORIC

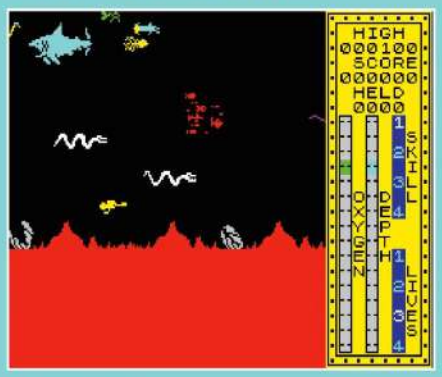
■ Durell stalwart Ron Jeffs took over the reins for the Tangerine Oric port of *Scuba Dive*, and he did a credible job of contesting Mike Richardson's game, although, as with the C64 version, there's no sign of the rotational control. The diver does move adeptly, however, lending the game a fair degree of playability, despite some strange graphics, such as the bizarre extended arm creature and a hovering starfish that is accompanied by an unpleasant shrill screech.

SCUBA SCORER HOW TO ACHIEVE NAUTICAL SUCCESS



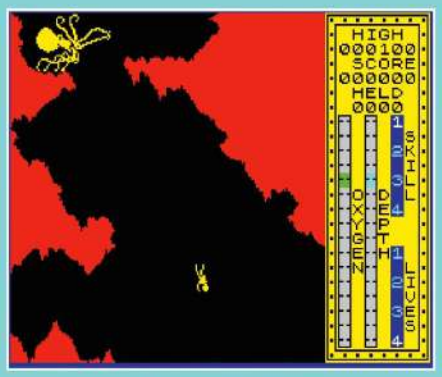
WATCH THE AIR

The balance between exploration and air supply is a constant battle in *Scuba Dive*. Dare you risk entering just one more cave in the hope of discovering that elusive treasure chest? Make sure you know how to get back, and keep an eye on those meters.



A BUSY SEA

Harrier Attack started out as a *Scramble* clone, while *Scuba Dive*'s original idea also came from an arcade machine – *Frogger*. With many of the underwater creatures bobbing to the left and right, the similarity is not lost on many of the screens in Durell's classic.



BEYOND THE DANGER LIES TREASURE

Soon after entering the deep blue, you'll encounter the giant octopus, its grasping tentacles protecting the entrance to the caverns below. It's a tricky creature to negotiate, but slipping past offers a bountiful reward below. Wait for your moment and swim for your life!

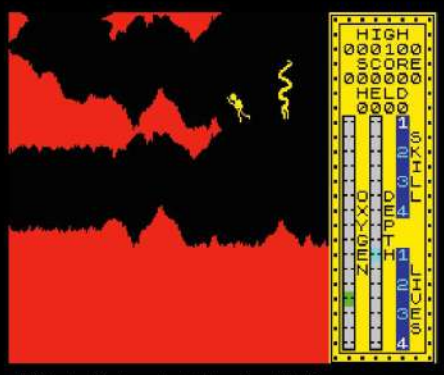
WHAT LIES BENEATH

SOME OF THE DANGERS THAT AWAIT YOU IN THE BRINY BELOW

▶ however, that we'd done enough shooting in *Harrier Attack*, so that went out of the window." With a large percentage of videogames requiring violence of one form or another, the notion of *Scuba Dive*'s protagonist being unarmed could have been met badly by Mike. But it wasn't. "Personally, I was quite happy to leave weapons out," he says. "I don't think the game needed them, even though it wasn't very consistent with a lot of Durell's output. But I do remember it was hotly debated at the time!"

Instead of impaling innocent marine life, *Scuba Dive*'s mechanics rely on descending into the depths and careful exploration, with the ultimate aim of recovering as much treasure as possible within the strict time limit. "I was thinking that there needed to be some sense of urgency – ie, the air running out – as well as a reward for exploration with new screens," Mike notes. While new air tanks can be found which extend the player's stay underwater, the intensity and tension of balancing remaining air with new discoveries and treasure, as well as avoiding the various gliding beasts, makes *Scuba Dive* an evocative experience, with any relief from reaching the boat in one piece short-lived – there's no rest for this rubber-clad hero. "The gameplay in *Scuba Dive* is so good, that even if it was hard, you could still enjoy watching the fish!" Robert recalls. "And there was no reason to suggest a game *had* to involve shooting – *Mario* and *Sonic* don't involve much shooting, either."

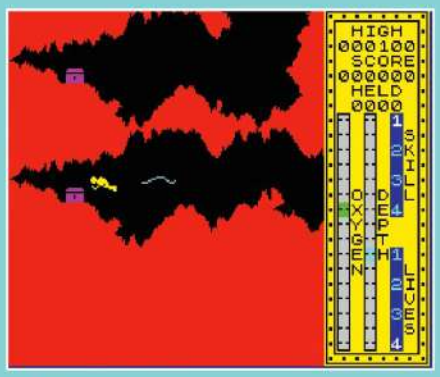
> "THE FEEDBACK FROM PRESS AND PLAYERS WAS FANTASTIC" MIKE RICHARDSON



[ZX Spectrum] On the way back to the surface, still dodging sea creatures.

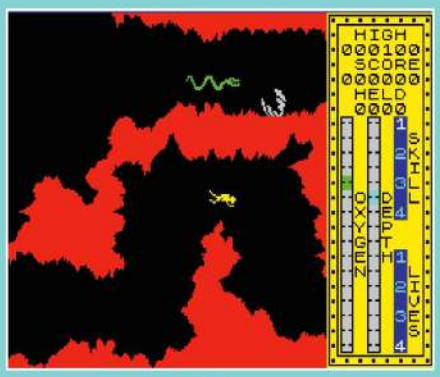
One early design decision that Mike made was to use a black background for the game, rather than the more logical blue. "On the Spectrum, it had to be black," he smiles. "The colours stand out so much better against black, and since the hardware 'BRIGHT' attribute of the screen applies to both foreground and background colour, if it's used on anything other than a black background you get a halo of bright background squares." The result was that Mike was able to introduce much more colour into his game, along with the randomly generated seabed. "That was very easy – I used a simple random number generator to select from a set of 8x8 character tiles, and then just had to ensure that the caves entrances and exits matched up."

Notwithstanding the ever-changing sea and its occupants, it's *Scuba Dive*'s tiny, yet lifelike, diver that most impresses, even today. Suspended in the sea, this adventurer is constantly moving, battling against not just sharks and jellyfish, but the constant ebb and flow of the ocean. Controlling the



BOOTY CALL

Treasure chests lay deep underwater, awaiting the daring diver. Often at the end of a craggy cave, these prizes can be collected and returned to the surface. Watch out for the oysters, too: hover nearby and they open, sometimes revealing a valuable pearl inside.



THE NARROW CAVES

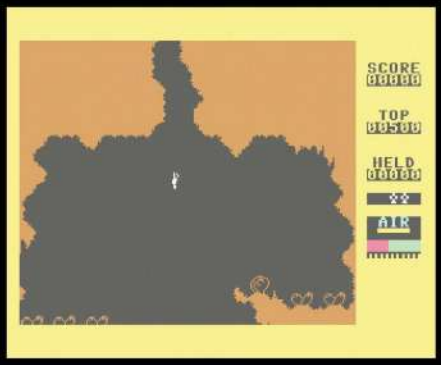
The rotational controls of the Spectrum game allows for expert and precise movement, and it's just as well considering the narrow apertures of many of *Scuba Dive*'s grottos. Snaring your wetsuit on the rocks is not good, so take your time and explore safely.

"AS THE C64 USED A DIFFERENT PROCESSOR, THERE WAS NEVER ANY QUESTION OF MIKE WRITING THAT VERSION. I HAD BEEN VERY PLEASED WITH THE CONVERSION OF HARRIER ATTACK, BUT THAT CODER WENT OFF TO PROGRAM CAR-BUILDING ROBOTS"
ROBERT WHITE

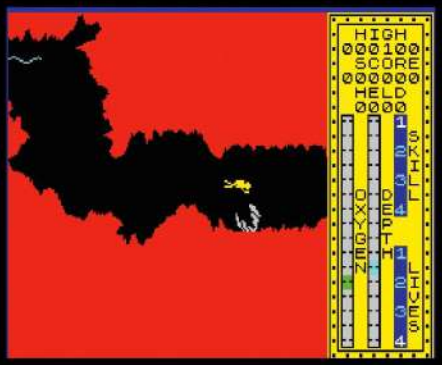
diver within the narrow caverns could have been a game-breaking issue; fortunately Mike employed a rotational method that gave the player expert control over their on-screen aquanaut. "[The rotational control] was because it could give better precision when manipulating the diver," explains Mike. "For example, when gathering the pearls, the player can approach horizontally and then rotate to collect – using direct controls, it would not have been possible to turn without moving forward, which may have had unfortunate consequences in some situations." The result was a convincing, living aquatic world in which the player could venture and swim around in easily, collecting treasure or just exploring new locations, should they wish.

The ZX Spectrum version of *Scuba Dive* took Mike Richardson three months to develop. "I think I was using cassette tape for storage during development, two copies for every save so I had a backup. It was arduous," he grimaces. "But memory wasn't a problem – when I ran out of memory, the game was practically finished. It was a useful limitation from that perspective, but there will always be something else that could be added." For *Scuba Dive*, that something was more plot and tasks for the player, plus a graphical flourish that would have accentuated the game's sunken theme. "I would have liked to have come up with better objectives, but I don't think I tried too hard! From what I'd seen in other games at the time, background and plot was generally weak, and didn't add anything for me. What would have been nice was some bubbles, but the memory ran out before I could add them."

Released in the autumn of 1983, *Scuba Dive* became an instant hit, wowing reviewers and gamers alike with its original scenario and beguiling gameplay. "The feedback from press and players was fantastic," says Mike. "There is nothing like the feeling you get from that kind of attention – that period was definitely the highlight of my working life."



[C64] Having negotiated the fluctuating seabed hole in the C64 game, it's time to delve into the caves below.



[ZX Spectrum] The precise rotational control scheme often comes in handy when your navigating tight passageways.

Sadly, over on the Spectrum's rival, the Commodore 64, things didn't turn out quite as well, as Robert explains. "As the C64 used a different processor, there was never any question of Mike writing that version. I had been very pleased with the conversion of *Harrier Attack*, but that coder went off to program car-building robots." The game that C64 owners played, while aesthetically similar to the Spectrum original, had a completely different control scheme that, coupled with some unattractive graphics, turned *Scuba Dive* into a different experience altogether. Gone was the Spectrum's precise rotational control, replaced with a clumsy four-directional method that sucked all the fun from the game. With Durell oddly backing the Oric computer in its early days, Durell's Ron Jeffs also did his best to create a rival to the Spectrum game. "Ron always did the Oric versions, but [*Scuba Dive*] didn't quite have the artistic appeal of Mike's version," notes Robert. "But it was a heck of a lot better than the Commodore 64 game!"

Yet despite the varying success on other platforms, *Scuba Dive* remains a classic ZX Spectrum game, and one that helped solidify Durell's respected position in the software market. "We were very relieved!" reveals Robert, "And we now had money to pay for proper adverts as well as admin staff and offices – no more working from a tiny attic room!" For programmer Mike Richardson, it was another evolutionary step in his coding life. "I deliberately wanted every game that I wrote to be different from any other, primarily so that players didn't get bored. It's not necessarily a good idea from a business perspective, but I wasn't really interested in that." With an extremely impressive roster of games behind him, we can't help asking Mike where he thinks *Scuba Dive* stands among his other many hits. "In terms of my favourites, it's probably third," he says thoughtfully. "I like *Turbo Esprit* for its technicality and then *Thanatos* for its animation. Then *Scuba Dive*, again for its animation, and also because I really like fish." A bronze medal behind *Turbo Esprit* and *Thanatos* is nothing to be ashamed of, especially for a game that was created three years earlier than its rivals. "*Scuba Dive* may not have been as popular as *Harrier Attack* or *Saboteur*, or as technically advanced as *Combat Lynx* or *Turbo Esprit* – but it was a joy to look at, fun to play and a significant hit," Robert concludes. "I'm also proud that we managed to make a game that was compelling to play, without the need to kill anything!" In today's tumultuous world, more than ever, there's a place for the peaceful and serene beauty of *Scuba Dive*. ✱

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Skate Or Die!

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **RELEASED:** 1987
» **DEVELOPER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

You've taken down Poseur Mike and Aggro Eddie, and now you have one opponent left to face – that green-haired twerp Lester. He doesn't even bother preparing a proper statement to explain his difficult level, instead just repeating the title of the game. How arrogant is this guy? Massively so, and so you've decided that it's your job to take him down a peg or two.

Armed with your jousting paddle, you cross the pool but fail to get anywhere near Lester. Your second pass sees him trickily stall on the lip of the pool, and your third is wasted trying to line up a clean run for the fourth attempt. But that's no good either, and you're starting to worry that defeat might be a possibility, when suddenly the stars – and more importantly, the skaters – align. You cross over at the lip and with a deft twirl, you knock Lester on his arse. First blood goes to you! Lester may as well get out of the pool right now, because there's a new king in town. ✱

BIO

This is no small deal, being EA's first ever internally developed game, produced by Don Traeger. If the multi-event format of EA's skating hit reminds you a little of *Summer Games* by Epyx, that's no coincidence – devs Michael Kosaka and Stephen Landrum had worked on games in that series. The game was converted to a variety of formats including ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Apple IIGS, PC, Atari ST and – via Konami – the NES. *Skate Or Die!* was popular and earned a NES-only sequel in 1990. The series was to be brought back by Criterion Games, but the remake was cancelled in favour of *Burnout 3*.

MORE CLASSIC SKATE OR DIE! MOMENTS

Rock On, Rob

There's an easy way to guarantee a good start to your Commodore 64 game, and that's to get Rob Hubbard in to do the music. The title screen theme for *Skate Or Die!* is one of his classic rock pieces, complete with an absolutely awesome electric guitar sound that shows true mastery of the SID chip.

Heaven Is A Half pipe

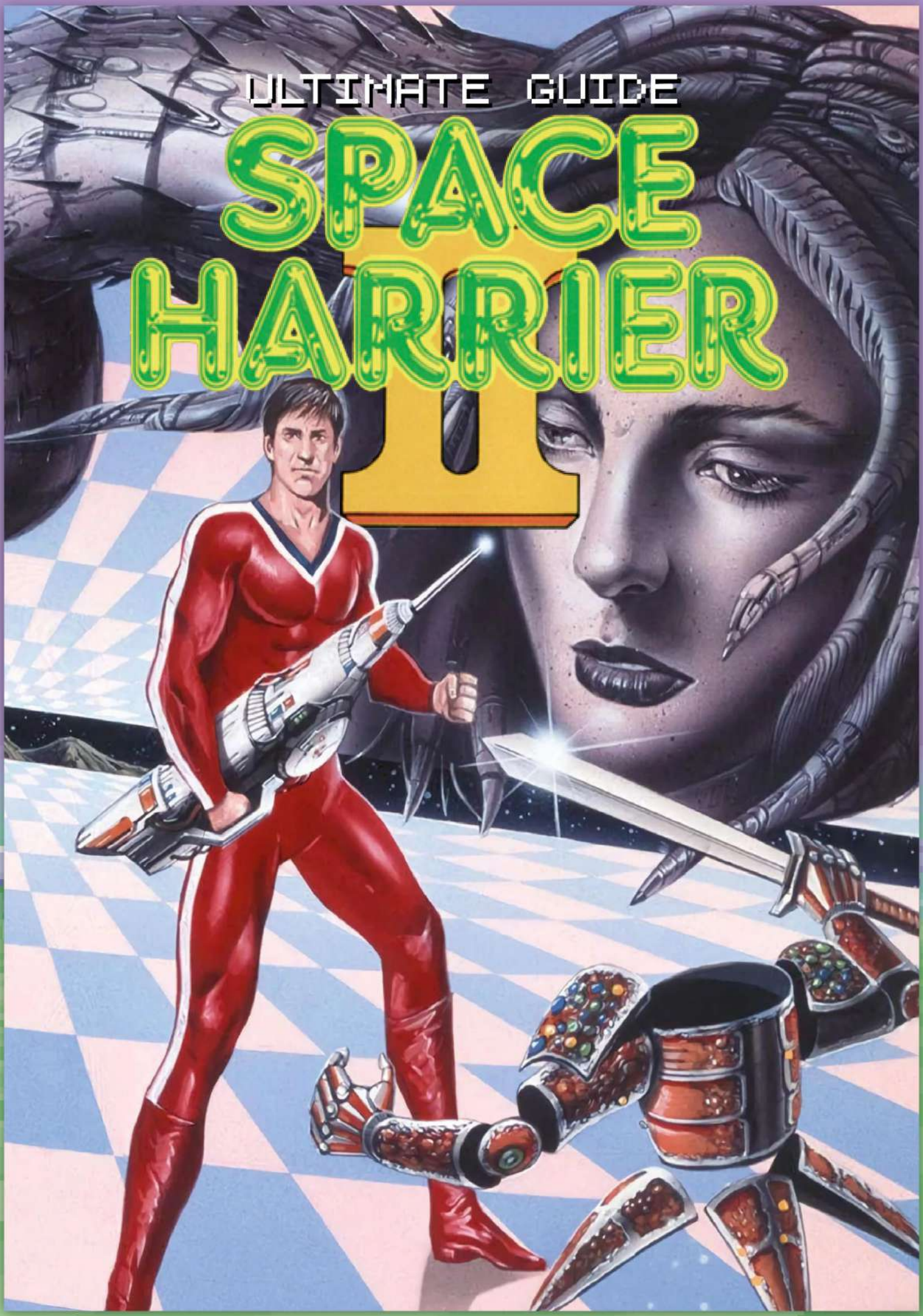
One of the events we don't often see in later extreme sports games is a high jump competition, and that's a shame because the one in *Skate Or Die!* is quite a lot of fun. Once you start getting the hang of it, you can get some truly amazing air – we hear tell of scores above 15 feet.

More Aggro

The Joust event wasn't the only place you could get a bit aggressive – if you fancied mixing it up a bit during a Jam session, it was entirely possible to send your adversary crashing into the concrete with a well-timed punch or kick. Just make sure you're able to take it before you go around dishing it out, yeah?

Bone Cruncher

As fun as it is shoving your fellow skaters to their doom, you've got to have some good humour whenever you take a spill. If you misjudge a jump and find that you've escaped the half pipe, your skater will come plummeting back down to the hard ground below with an almighty thud, shedding his protective gear.


ULTIMATE GUIDE
SPACE HARRIER II

SPACE HARRIER SAGA

THE CONCLUSION TO SPACE HARRIER II REVEALS THE SERIES TIMELINE

"ALERT! FANTASYLAND FALLS INTO CRISIS NOW." WITH THAT MANGLED MESSAGE, THE HEROIC HARRIER RETURNS TO FACE A NEW WAVE OF INTERSTELLAR INTERLOPERS – WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY CARRYING THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF SEGA'S NEW 16-BIT CONSOLE

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

The game's cover art was created by Sega illustrator Masashi Iwasaki.

***Space Harrier II* was precisely one half of the Mega Drive's launch line-up when it debuted in Japan in October 1988; the other was *Super Thunder Blade*.** Such was Sega's success in the arcade sector at the time, it had a vast reserve of titles to draw from, yet it chose to adapt two of its arcade heavyweights for one clear reason: to demonstrate that the Mega Drive was the first console to truly deliver the 'arcade at home' experience.

There was an issue, however. Both *Space Harrier* (1985) and *Thunder Blade* (1987) were built on Sega's sprite-scaling technology, and the Mega Drive was good but not *that* good. In fact, the first arcade-perfect port of *Space Harrier* wouldn't arrive until 1996 on the next-generation Saturn. So with a sleight of hand, Sega developed the games as sequels rather than conversions. This served to reduce unfavourable comparisons with the original coin-ops, while at the same time promising something fresh and exciting.

The jury's definitely out on whether this worked for *Super Thunder Blade*. New minibosses were added and one of the stages was reworked, but crucially the top-down sections where you could control the chopper's altitude (a real showcase for the sprite-scaling graphics) were removed. For *Space Harrier II*, 12 new stages were devised, each with new enemies and bosses, plus two remixed bonus stages where you jumped on a jet board. To achieve the 3D effect, the sprites were drawn at a variety of different sizes – typically nine variations, from small to large – to give the impression that they were zooming towards or away from you. As a result, the game lacked the silky smooth 3D movement of the coin-op, but the speed at which the sprites were cycled, coupled with the sheer number of sprites on-screen, ensured that the choppiness was quickly overlooked.

The technical limitations also resulted in more creative and varied boss battles. Most of the original game's bosses were simply giant beasties that filled the screen, whereas in the sequel their visual impact was lessened so they had to work harder to impress. New guardians like Medusa, Paranoia and Mantichora made for more challenging showdowns.

In a neat touch, Squilla, the dragon boss from the coin-op's opening stage, returned in the sequel – but was demoted to a miniboss that appeared before new monster Trimuller.

As this was a home console game, Sega added several configurable options. You could toggle rapid fire, choose from three difficulty levels and, crucially, select which stage you started from. This was useful for practising stages, but regardless of where you began, you still had to fight though all 12 regular levels before you unlocked

In chronological order, *Space Harrier 3D* on the Master System comes first. Harrier is shown defeating Dark Uriah, the final boss, thus freeing the friendly white dragon Uriah.

You ride on Uriah's back in the bonus stages of arcade *Space Harrier*, the second game in the series. Here you defeat Wiwi Jumbo (really) to end The Battle Of Dragonland.

Ten space years later, our hero returns in *Space Harrier II* to defeat his evil doppelganger Dark Harrier and prevent Fantasyland from being blown into oblivion.

THE LOST CROSSOVER

THE SAD FATE OF SPACE FANTASY ZONE

Sega's *Space Harrier* and *Fantasy Zone* games share the same universe and timeline of events, so it was inevitable that a crossover title would occur at some point. *Space Fantasy Zone* was developed by NEC Avenue as a PC Engine CD-ROM game and was basically a hyper-cute version of *Space Harrier* in which you controlled Opa-Opa.

The game was previewed in 1991 but its release was later scrapped. We know it was almost complete as a beta version has since leaked online. What we don't know is why it was canned. It plays pretty well so it's doubtful that quality concerns were to blame, so we have to assume it was down to some issue between Sega and NEC at the time.

» [PC Engine] A fully playable prototype of the game has been available online for many years.

▶ the 13th final stage. Here, you battled all of the bosses again before facing Dark Harrier, your evil doppelganger who was just as quick and agile as you. Defeat him and this short but effective blaster was spent.

Space Harrier II didn't present a long-term challenge, being barely removed from the coin-op, but it did show off the latent potential of the Mega Drive. If there's any doubt about this, you only have to look at some of the early press reaction to the console and *Space Harrier II* in particular. In December 1988, weekly tech magazine *New Computer Express* got hold of what it believed to be the only Mega Drive in the UK and crowned it 'Sega's 16-bit sensation'. "*Space Harrier II* looks more than stunning," buzzed the respected Tony Takoushi. "We were left wondering how much massive screen sprites could be shifted at ultra-high speeds without any discernible loss in the velocities of other animated objects." No slowdown, in other words. "The feature which knocked us out the most was the perspective change when [Harrier] rises into the sky. The ground falls away beneath you and the horizon drops accordingly to give you a true perspective viewpoint. The Mega Drive is straight out of the future."

» [Mega Drive] Where do you want your tour of Fantasyland to begin? You can start in any of the game's 12 stages.

» [Mega Drive] Move along people, there's nothing to see here. Just brawling with a giant pink cat.

The import version was reviewed in the June 1989 issue of *The Game Machine*. "*Space Harrier II* is a truly awesome piece of coding," summarised the review, where it scored 85%. "The speed of the game is insanely fast, the graphics are excellent, and the ferocity of enemy attacks makes other versions look positively passive." The mention of other versions is appropriate, as Sega clearly wanted the game to be the best home version available – especially as the original *Space Harrier* had been ported to multiple systems with a surprising amount of success, including Sega's own Master System (twice), the rival PC Engine console and a whole range of home computers courtesy of Elite Systems.

The sequel also benefitted Sega in that European publishers flocked to bag the rights. Grandslam Entertainment won out and commissioned Teque to produce the home computer versions. These generally turned out well, particularly the 16-bit versions, but they were difficult to recommend on release as Elite cunningly reissued its original ▶

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE VARIOUS VERSIONS STACKED UP

MEGA DRIVE

Not a conversion of the coin-op, or indeed a true sequel, this is more of a remix designed to show off the capabilities of the then-new Mega Drive while adding new enemies. On that rationale it succeeds, but it struggles to match, let alone surpass, its iconic predecessor.

ATARI ST

A solid conversion that can't match the framerate and number of on-screen colours of the Mega Drive original, but comes pretty close. The music, sound effects and speech are all fine. Playing with a mouse is brilliant and might be the definitive way to play *Space Harrier*.

AMIGA

A port of the ST version, featuring identical sprites and backgrounds. It does run at a slightly wider resolution, but unlike on the ST, you're forced to choose between music and effects. The music by Matt Furniss is good, but it means you miss Harrier's famous death scream.

COMMODORE 64

It may be the only version to lack the chequerboard floor, but the 3D effect and sensation of speed is reproduced quite well here. The graphics lack detail however, and this is particularly evident in the boss battles. On the plus side, the SID soundtrack is first-rate.

[Mega Drive] Some familiar enemies like Barbarian, pictured here, returned for the sequel.

"12 new stages were devised, each with new enemies and bosses, plus two remixed bonus stages where you jumped on a jet board"

ZX SPECTRUM

The speed is fine. Music and effects are great (on the 128K version). The monochrome sprites and chequerboard floor blend together, making it difficult to see what's going on. That visual impairment is compounded by having a static graphic take up a quarter of the screen.

AMSTRAD CPC

Adapted from the Speccy version, this too suffers from the screen-hogging graphic, presumably added to improve performance. That aside, the sprites are more colourful and better defined, and the boss encounters are the best of any of the 8-bit conversions.

MSX

The little-known conversion is sadly no hidden gem. As you'd expect, it's just a straight port of the Spectrum version with no obvious optimisation in place, so it's the same but slower. The original game wasn't ported to the MSX so we suppose it's better than nothing. Just.

TEQUE-NIQUE

HOW THE COMPUTER CONVERSIONS CAME TO BE

Teque's conversion of *Space Harrier II* was the subject of a in-depth preview in the January 1990 issue of *The One* magazine. In it, 21-year-old lead coder Mike Hart revealed how the lead Atari ST version came together. "I did the chequerboard floor first. That's really just a simple 3D routine, and once I'd got that moving in and out, and banking left and right, I tackled the sprite handling. The sprites are huge, and there are so many of them – about 50." Artist Jason Wilson used OCP Art Studio to draw the sprites and gained a head start by ripping some of the graphics. "We took the cartridge, broke it open and put it through a ROM reader to suck the graphics out. We used the initial sprite as a reference and drew the rest of the frames from that."

In a parting shot, Mike bemoaned the lack of support from Sega. "I know that coin-op people are all very tight-lipped, but I think Sega is actually the worst of the lot. The people there wouldn't tell us anything." Mike was happy to spill secrets, however, and hid further details – and a request – in the game's code: "*Space Harrier II* was written on a Mega ST 4 with a 20-meg hard drive using DevpacST 2, plus six months of sweat and tears. If there are any attractive female hackers out there, drop me a line…"

BOSS RUSH

TIPS ON HOW TO TAKE DOWN THE 13 FIENDS OF FANTASYLAND AND BE HOME IN TIME FOR SUPPER

TRIMULLER

Cover star of Grandslam's conversions, this tortoise of terror shoots a salvo of fireballs as it approaches, then briefly exposes each of its three heads before retreating.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This weak guardian is a walkover. Dodge the fireballs by moving in a clockwise direction, then hammer each head in turn until all three are gone.

PARANOIA

One of the game's weirder bosses, this witchy being zooms in and out of view, shooting fireballs in your direction. A curious circle of glowing orbs pulsate around it.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Those orbs are its life force, so concentrate your fire on them. When they're all gone it's powerless, so shoot it freely and watch its evil face grimace.

BRIZARD

The dragon is like a throwback from the first game. It approaches rapidly, firing energy rings as its long body coils and twists. It changes colour as it loses energy.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This can be a slog. Employ the familiar clockwise evasion technique as it jinks towards you, then attack its rear as it retreats.

NEO DOM

This boss is a bit of a con, as it's just a bunch of six regular Doms that appear throughout the level. Their combined firepower can be pretty powerful however.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

As they swarm, move up and down to avoid the barrage while firing constantly. Stay low when they move up close, and just keep plugging away.

MANTICHORA

This giant winged kitty swoops down from above, then when on the ground, it scampers left and right before rushing towards you. It's completely absurd.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Target its wings to bring it down, then stay on the ground in the centre of the screen as it runs around. Be sure to evade when it charges towards you.

"Space Harrier II didn't present a long-term challenge but it did show off the latent potential of the Mega Drive"

CRAGON

It's a giant jellyfish that sloshes around and attacks by shooting its slimy offspring at you. Its weak spot is the large mass of gloopy stuff in its 'head' section.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

You don't need to shoot the little Cragons – just avoid them as best as you can. It will then approach so you can finish off the job.

BINS BEEN

This is easily Fantasyland's most embarrassing boss – a 20-sided spaceship that tries to hypnotise you into submission with its relentless spinning action.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Bins will try and crush you so move up or down to avoid it. It will briefly open up, enabling you to fire a shot straight up its exhaust port.

WIZARD

This joke shop magician glides back and forth, splits into three apparitions, then merges back into one, and generally makes a massive nuisance of itself.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

It only shoots fire at you when it spins, so counter this by circling in the opposite direction while firing. When it's not spinning you're free to unload into it.

MEDUSA

She arrives in serene fashion before her face twists into a monstrous visage. The true battle then begins, with her twisting and snaking around the screen.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This is just another dragon battle, similar to Brizard. Dodge the energy rings as she approaches, then attack the head and body as she retreats.

NEO TOMOS

Remember Tomos, that ball-like enemy from the first game that opened up like a flower and spat fire at you? This boss is basically seven of them, all swirling together.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Keep moving in a – surprise surprise – clockwise direction to avoid their fire. They're briefly vulnerable when they open up to shoot at you.

LOVE FACE

The delightfully named Love Face presents its ugly mug before splitting into four segments. It then reforms and angrily spews fireballs before repeating its charade.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

It only attacks once its face has reformed, so shoot it continually until that occurs. Its fireballs are fast but nothing you can't handle by this point.

CTHUGHA

This is basically Brizard's faster, nastier twin and it's probably the toughest boss battle in the game. It attacks in the same way but the challenge is increased.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

As before, stay well clear as it snaps towards you, then quickly target it as it turns its back on you. Repeat the technique until you snuff this flame out.

DARK HARRIER

You face your twisted evil twin once you've ran the gauntlet of all the other bosses. He moves in a figure of eight pattern and will teleport when hit, the cad.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Move continually to avoid his fire, alternating between clockwise and anticlockwise patterns. Bide your time and he'll eventually vaporise.

conversion as a budget title at precisely the same time. Beyond fans, who was going to pay around three times more for an update?

Following its release, Sega overlooked *Space Harrier II* in favour of the first game. Versions for the Sega 32X, Saturn, Dreamcast, Game Boy Advance and PlayStation 2 followed. That changed in 2005 with the release of *Sega Ages 2500 Volume 20* for the PS2. Dubbed *Space Harrier Complete Collection*, the Japanese pack contained *Space Harrier II* alongside the arcade, Master System and Game Gear versions of the original, plus the Master System exclusive *Space Harrier 3D*. This was easily one of the highlights of the *Sega Ages 2500* series.

Elsewhere, the game was missing from both the 2006 *Mega Drive Collection* for PS2 and PSP, and the 2009 *Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* for PS3 and Xbox 360 (bizarrely the coin-op *was* included as an unlockable extra). It was a case of third time lucky as the game was finally featured on the 2018 *Mega Drive Classics* compilation for PS4, Xbox One and Switch. It was also one of the games included on last year's Mega Drive Mini console.

Revisiting *Space Harrier II* today is a slightly sobering experience. At the time it succeeded in showing off the Mega Drive's arcade credentials, yet it now struggles to be anything other than a relic from the console's earliest days, alongside *Super Thunder Blade* and *Altered Beast*. But if you were a Sega kid, weaned on the Mega Drive, it can be difficult to resist the occasional nostalgia-fuelled trip to Fantasyland.

Basketbrawl

JAM FESTIVAL

« RETROREVIVAL

» Atari 7800 » 1990 » Atari

To be honest with you, the Atari 7800 is not a system I'm tremendously well-acquainted with, largely for lack of opportunities to dabble with it. I never came across one in a charity shop or at a boot sale, and rarely saw the system outside of conventions. Plus, it's not like the library has been widely ported. That's why I was so pleased to see the system represented on Atari's collections for the Evercade – finally, I'd get a chance to sit down and spend some proper time with games like *Motor Psycho*, *Planet Smashers* and, of course, *Ninja Golf*. But while the unlikely mixture of long drives and high kicks is more notorious, I spent more time with another mixture of combat and sports – *Basketbrawl*.

I was having fun with it, so I decided to take a look online to find out how other people felt about the game. To my surprise, I learned that some people consider the game to be an absolute stinker. This game got 31% in *Raze* back in the day, with the reviewer complaining that "it is totally unplayable" and that "the computer opponent won't let you join in".

Now don't get me wrong, there are definitely some oddities about this game. I often find myself wondering who keeps throwing knives onto the court, and whether that's a particularly effective way of trying to harm players. But this feels to me like a reasonably solid two-on-two arcade basketball game in the mould of something like *Arch Rivals*, not the worst basketball-related videogame prior to the era of *Shaq Fu*. It's not *NBA Jam*, but it's far better than some of the critics out there would have you believe.

But that's fine, isn't it? Every time I smack the ball away from the hands of another player, I'm not thinking, "Ugh, this guy said the game I'm playing is rubbish." I'm mentally planning my next drive to the basket. I guess that's an important thing to remember – no critic is infallible, and you're entitled to enjoy a game even if the reviews aren't very good. ✱

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

MEGA MAN GAMES

The Blue Bomber is one of Capcom's best-known heroes, and his enduring appeal ensures that his games are constantly in demand. But with plenty of games released in limited quantities, the main weapon he's armed with seems to be a Wallet Buster

Words by Nick Thorpe

MEGABUCKS

MEGA MAN X3

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
RELEASE: 1995

Being a fan of *Mega Man* can be a bit of a financial struggle at times, and few games illustrate that quite so well as *Mega Man X3*. The original Super Nintendo version made use of the CX4 enhancement chip for impressive 3D wireframes and other effects, but it was released late in the life of the console – usually an indicator of high prices. The game was later ported to PlayStation and Saturn, but neither of these versions were released in North America. If you're equipped to run import games and don't mind missing out on the storyline, picking up any of the Japanese versions of *Mega Man X3* is a perfectly affordable prospect. If you want to buy any of the other versions, prepare for pain. The European SNES version is particularly punishing on the wallet, reflecting the region's cooler reception to both character and console. The good news is that you can leave it to the collectors – *Mega Man X3* is on two compilations, both considerably cheaper than the original game, so obtaining a copy to play is within reach.

» [SNES] The huge cost of real English carts means this is one for the die-hard collector only.

MENAGERIE OF MAVERICKS

Your chance to meet and beat the eight bosses of Mega Man X3

Blast Hornet

This agile pest likes to fly about the place, shooting Parasitic Bombs at our hero. You can win by bringing him down to Earth with a Gravity Well.

Blizzard Buffalo

This gigantic enemy has an oversized arena and an ice beam that's somehow even bigger. Keep well away and only fire when he's on-screen.

Crush Crawfish

Don't let this guy grab X – if he does, he'll crush him to bits. Get yourself up a wall and attack him with the Triad Thunder for massive damage.

Gravity Beetle

Despite his name, Gravity Beetle likes to jump a lot. Your best bet here is to stick and move, using the Ray Splasher to exploit his weakness.

Neon Tiger

Faced with a foe that can block your charged shots, make sure you only fire regular ones. The Spinning Blade can also help you win this fight.

Toxic Seahorse

It seems this robot, tasked with restricting the water supply, is vulnerable to cold – the Frost Shield can prevent him from getting attacks in.

Tunnel Rhino

This hefty foe charges about a lot, and is invincible while flashing. Wear through his thick hide with the Acid Burst if you've managed to get it.

Volt Catfish

This guy's shocking, and not because he assumes a false identity online for weird kicks. Knock his power out with the use of the Tornado Fang.

EXPECT TO PAY £1,100+ (SNES EUROPE)

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ (SNES JAPAN)

EXPECT TO PAY £190+ SATURN EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ (SATURN JAPAN)

EXPECT TO PAY £430+ SNES USA

EXPECT TO PAY £135+ PS EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £6+ (PS JAPAN)

THE STANDARD BEARER

MEGA MAN 2

EXPECT TO PAY £70+ (USA)

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ (JAPAN)

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
RELEASE: 1988

With 1.5 million copies sold, *Mega Man 2* is the best-selling game in the series – and its price is typical of *Mega Man* games, ranging from affordable to insane. A mint, sealed, first production run US copy actually fetched $75,000 at auction in late 2019! If you don't fancy remortgaging your house, the PAL release isn't too bad, but complete NTSC copies for NES or Famicom will cost you quite a bit. If you like collecting variants, look out for the German release, which has nicer box art than either of the other western versions, and the recent iam8bit '*Legacy Edition*' release. As with any cardboard boxed game, condition matters – a little damage can bring the price down a long way. Loose copies are far cheaper than the prices we've listed for complete copies here, too.

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ (EUROPE)

» [NES] Some special weapons are more useful than others – the Air Shooter utterly wrecks Crash Man.

» [NES] It can be tricky to the point of frustrating at times, but people love *Mega Man*'s second outing the most.

MONEY SPIN-OFF

THE MISADVENTURES OF TRON BONNE

EXPECT TO PAY £105+ (EUROPE)

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
RELEASE: 1999

If you thought you could avoid high-priced *Mega Man* games by looking towards the spin-offs, think again – this *Mega Man Legends* side-project rivals some of the main games for desirability. This 3D game sees you take control of Tron Bonne, the mischievous air pirate who seeks to pull off her greatest theft yet, across a variety of puzzle, action and adventure stages. The use of the Lego-esque Servbots as minions helps to distinguish the game from the main series, as they can be trained up and sent into action to assist Tron during stages. Unfortunately *The Misadventures Of Tron Bonne* has never appeared in a compilation, so if you fancy playing it you'd better fork out for a rather expensive original copy, or else make an investment in some Japanese lessons.

EXPECT TO PAY £160+ (USA)

» [PlayStation] The giant robot Tron Bonne pilots feels satisfyingly weighty to handle in gameplay.

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ (JAPAN)

» [PlayStation] Puzzles aren't a huge part of the *Mega Man* series normally, but they are quite welcome here.

CLASSIC COMPILATION

MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

DEVELOPER: ATOMIC PLANET ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASE: 2004

If you're looking for an introductory compilation, the *Mega Man Legacy Collection* games on modern consoles might tickle your fancy, but they actually lack some of the features of this older compilation. *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* includes *Mega Man 1-8*, as well as the two CPS2 arcade games which are unlockable bonuses. The first six games in the series were based on the '*Complete Works*' releases for the PlayStation, which includes updated HUD graphics and the Navi Mode, which provides advice from other characters – a welcome feature in these notoriously tricky games. Unfortunately, the presentation of *Mega Man 7* and *Mega Man 8* is not ideal. *Mega Man 7*'s ending was cut due to difficulties in emulating Mode 7, while *Mega Man 8* is based on the PlayStation version rather than the updated Saturn version, and has some sound bugs. It's not perfect, but it is cheap.

» [GameCube] Some horizontal shimmering can be seen during scrolling due to the narrow original resolution of the NES.

» [GameCube] Minor alterations were made to *Mega Man 7* for technical and age ratings reasons.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Exploring the different features of each version of Anniversary Collection

PlayStation 2

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ (PS2 USA)

The PS2 version of the collection is reasonable, containing remixed soundtracks for the earlier game and the pilot episode of the Ruby Spears *Mega Man* cartoon as a bonus unlockable video. Controls are fixed and cannot be reconfigured, which is the biggest knock against what is an otherwise good version of the compilation.

GameCube

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ (GC USA)

The GameCube version is surprisingly weak. It lacks the remixed soundtracks available in the other versions, and offers a Keiji Inafune interview from G4 TV as its bonus video. The big problem is that buttons can't be reconfigured, and the button layout has been inexplicably reversed from the NES originals.

Xbox

EXPECT TO PAY £4+ (XBOX USA)

Microsoft's console got the game last, but it got arguably the best version. Remixed music is in, the Inafune video is joined by an episode of *Mega Man NT Warrior*, and best of all, controls can be remapped. It does have the odd graphical issue, exacerbated with the use of the Xbox 360's backwards compatibility mode.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Rock The Search
When looking for Japanese versions of games, remember to enter the Japanese '*Rockman*' name – sellers won't always add the English '*Mega Man*' title.

Think Local
If you want Japanese games, you'll get better prices in Japanese marketplaces. Get to grips with using Yahoo Auctions Japan and your money will go far further.

Confirm Authenticity
When games are running to these kinds of high prices, you don't want to receive a fake. Ask your seller to confirm the authenticity of cartridges.

Consider Compilations
As you'll have seen, plenty of these games are pricey. Unless you're a hedge fund manager or a really big fan, this might be the time to pick up modern re-releases.

POCKET POWER BATTLES

ROCKMAN: BATTLE & FIGHTERS

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASE:	2000

For a good few years, if you wanted to experience the boss rush of *Mega Man*'s arcade outings at home, this Japan-exclusive Neo Geo Pocket Color game was the only way to do it. *Rockman: Battle & Fighters* comprises simplified conversions of *Mega Man: The Power Battle* and *Mega Man 2: The Power Fighters*, featuring the same one-on-one encounters with the Robot Masters, but redrawn in a style evoking the NES games. While the arcade games have since been converted, you'll still need to splash some cash if you want to pick up Mega Man's only star turn on SNK hardware, as this game remains quite highly prized due to the lack of a western release.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] A choice of playable characters does help to add variety to a pretty short pair of games.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] The standard of the sprites and backgrounds is quite high, despite the compromises required.

THE ORIGINALS

Discover the two arcade games that form the basis of this package

The Power Battle cuts the stories of the classic *Mega Man* games down to a series of boss fights. Strategy is important as you'll gain a new weapon in each fight, meaning the order you tackle stages will influence your chance of success. *The Power Fighters* added bosses that can switch attack patterns during play, while playable characters can perform special attacks and summon robotic friends to assist them in battle.

MEET DR WAHWEE

MEGA MAN 8

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASE:	1996

Mega Man's eighth classic outing is a bit divisive amongst fans. Proponents of the game will point to confident execution of the template players love, combined with 2D presentation that has aged gracefully. Detractors, however, lament a lack of innovation and FMV cutscenes that feature some truly atrocious voice acting. As a result, we'd recommend that you choose one of the cheaper versions if you fancy finding out how much you'll personally enjoy it. The PlayStation version sold very well in the US and Japan and was very easily acquired, but *Mega Man*'s lower European profile led to poor sales and rarity. The Saturn version features a variety of little visual improvements and the addition of two mid-bosses, so it's the one to go for – if you don't mind sacrificing English. The US Saturn release is rather rare indeed, and commands a very high price when you can find a copy.

» [PlayStation] Designed for 32-bit machines, *Mega Man 8*'s 2D artwork was beautiful and still looks good today.

» [PlayStation] While the game design was fairly rote by this point, shoot-'em-up action provides welcome variety.

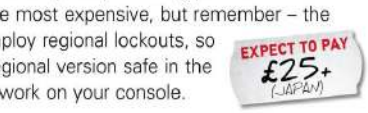
BEST SERVED COLD

MEGA MAN: DR WILY'S REVENGE

DEVELOPER:	MINAKUCHI ENGINEERING
RELEASE:	1991

Long before Mega Man's prolific Game Boy Advance run made handhelds his second home, Capcom tasked an external developer with bringing the action-packed series to the small screen. It worked out pretty well, too, as the game blended elements from the first and second NES games to create an adventure that was popular enough to spawn four sequels. Prices follow the general regional trend, with Japan being the lowest and Europe being the highest – though it must be said, there's a huge price variance based on condition in Japan. The US version was re-released as part of the '*Players Choice*' budget range, increasing supply and consequently lowering prices. The European version is the most expensive, but remember – the Game Boy doesn't employ regional lockouts, so you can choose any regional version safe in the knowledge that it will work on your console.

» [Game Boy] As an early game, this limits our hero to his standard Blaster until he starts beating bosses.



MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

MEGA MAN

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	1987

EXPECT TO PAY
£125+ (EUROPE) **£240+** (USA) **£75+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN 3

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	1990

EXPECT TO PAY
£50+ (EUROPE) **£35+** (USA) **£8+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN X

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY
£135+ (EUROPE) **£60+** (USA) **£15+** (EUROPE)

MEGA MAN SOCCER

DEVELOPER:	SUN L
RELEASED:	1994

EXPECT TO PAY
£160+ (USA) **£10+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN (GAME GEAR)

DEVELOPER:	FREESTYLE
RELEASED:	1995

EXPECT TO PAY
£480+ (US)

WILY PRICED

MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS

EXPECT TO PAY £500+ (EUROPE)

EXPECT TO PAY £150+ (JAPAN)

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASE:	1994

■ *Mega Man*'s Sega debut is a compilation including remastered versions of the first three games. While seemingly a perfect introduction to the character, it was not the event it could have been – European players, being unfamiliar with the NES games, just didn't pick the game up in great numbers, while the Japanese audience never took to the Mega Drive like the rest of the world. Inexplicably, in the US market, which embraced both *Mega Man* and the Genesis, it was kept back as a Sega Channel exclusive. The game has always had a reputation as one of the pricier Mega Drive games out there, and the inclusion of the game on the Mega Drive Mini hasn't changed that – the Japanese version, named *Rockman Mega World*, is easier on your bank balance but still not cheap.

» [Mega Drive] There's something to be said for reasonable attack patterns, as this robo-wolf-thing could learn.

MORE THAN NOTHING

MEGA MAN ZERO 4

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ (JAPAN)

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ (EUROPE)

DEVELOPER:	INTI CREATES
RELEASE:	2005

■ While *Mega Man* games were frequently released for the Game Boy Advance, the man himself didn't star in the main platforming action. Instead, that was left to the *Mega Man X* cast member Zero, a long-haired chap with a cool lightsaber. *Mega Man Zero 4* represents his last starring role on the platform, and features some lovely sprite work as well as refined stage design, including a new weather system that allows you to increase the difficulty in stages to reveal secrets. The game follows the common *Mega Man* pricing pattern, with Japanese copies being the cheapest and European copies being the most expensive. However, it's worth noting that both the *Mega Man Zero Collection* for Nintendo DS and the modern *Mega Man Zero/ZX Collection* each come in under the price of a boxed English copy of this.

EXPECT TO PAY £35+ (JAPAN)

» [Game Boy Advance] Expecting players are already familiar with the previous *Zero* games, Inti Creates did no handholding.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

MEGA MAN & BASS

EXPECT TO PAY £80+ (GBA EUROPE)

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASE:	1998

■ This Super Nintendo release came so late that when it launched, it was a Japanese exclusive (known as *Rockman & Forte*) and you couldn't buy it normally – you had to get it loaded onto a rewritable *Nintendo Power* cartridge. Its popularity convinced Capcom to give it a traditional release, which we're thankful for as it's a very good outing in the classic *Mega Man* style. The high SNES price is unsurprising, but prices for the American Game Boy Advance version have shot up since the beginning of April – the game was selling for $50-$70 and suddenly spiked to the $75-$90 range. Hopefully this is just a temporary effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and we've based our guidance on that assumption, but the increase is worth bearing in mind if you're planning to purchase the game soon.

» [SNES] Bass feels a little easier to play as than Mega Man, making this a good entry for new players.

» [SNES] This game actually recycles assets from the 32-bit *Mega Man 8* – an unusual thing for a SNES game to do.

EXPECT TO PAY £35+ (SNES JAPAN)

DYNAMIC DUO

What sets Mega Man and Bass – or even Rockman and Forte – apart?

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ (GBA USA)

Mega Man

The series' regular hero plays very much as you'd expect him to, as he has his classic moveset here. His floor slide is present and correct, and he has the ability to charge up a destructive shot that will wipe out most regular enemies with very little trouble.

Bass

Bass modernises the feel of the series somewhat, with a handful of helpful new abilities. He's more mobile thanks to his ability to dash and perform double jumps, while his rapid-fire Buster can be aimed in seven different directions, making enemies easier to hit.

MEGA MAN LEGENDS

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	1998

EXPECT TO PAY

£75+ (EUROPE) **£30+** (USA) **£1+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN XTREME

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	2000

EXPECT TO PAY

£35+ (EUROPE) **£50+** (USA) **£12+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN ZERO

DEVELOPER:	INTI CREATES
RELEASED:	2002

EXPECT TO PAY

£80+ (EUROPE) **£45+** (US) **£5+** (JAPAN)

MEGA MAN X COLLECTION

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	2006

EXPECT TO PAY

£2.50+ (PS2 USA) **£11+** (GC USA)

MEGA MAN POWERED UP

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASED:	2006

EXPECT TO PAY

£25+ (EUROPE) **£10+** (USA) **£1+** (JAPAN)

Mega Duck

» **MANUFACTURER:** Welback Holdings » **YEAR:** 1993
» **COST:** ft 129 (launch), £20+ (today, unboxed)

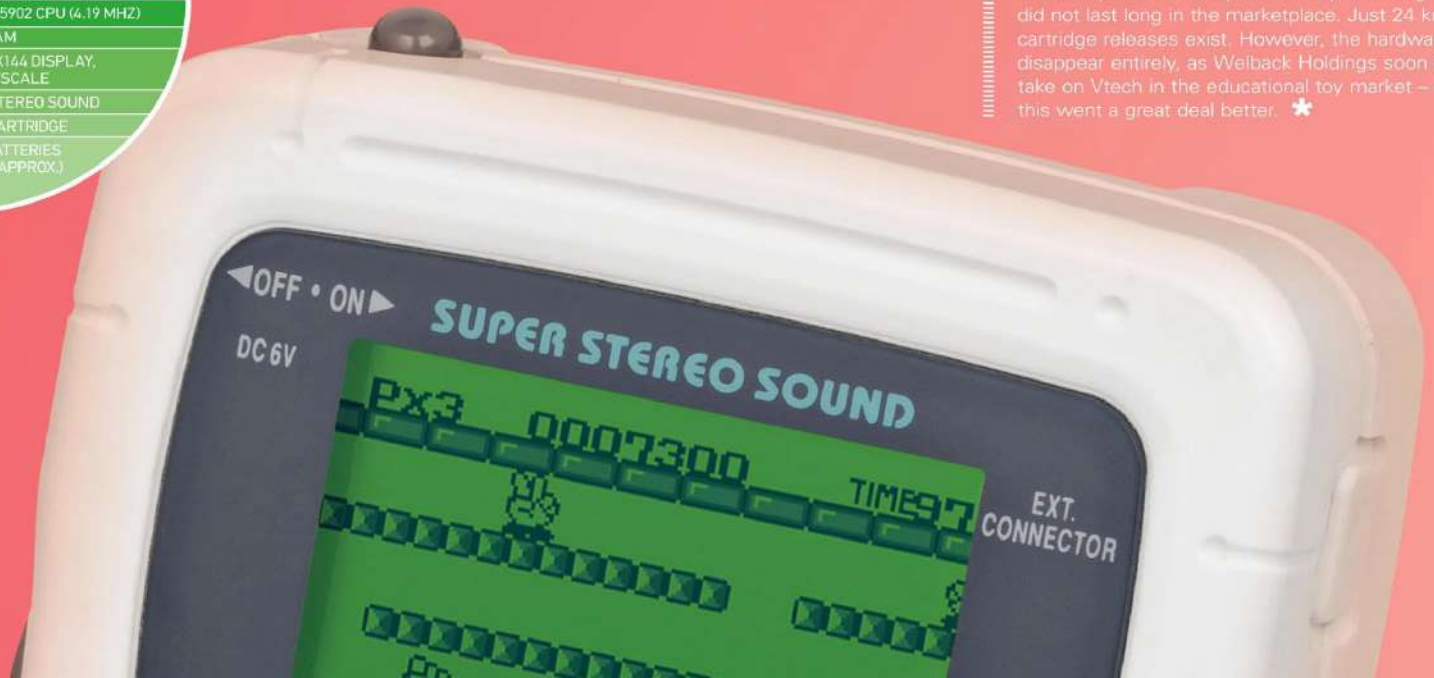
When Hong Kong-based Welback Holdings decided to enter the handheld gaming market, the company was clearly inspired by a rather popular handheld console that already existed – and you'll win no prizes for guessing which one. Never mind the exterior design with its identical control configuration and extraordinarily similar display – the Mega Duck is surprisingly similar to the Game Boy on a technical level, too, to the point that some of its games were later ported over pretty directly as unlicensed releases. Additionally, a six-pin expansion port was available for multiplayer action on the games that supported it.

A number of different companies marketed the system under the Mega Duck name in continental Europe, including Creatronic, Videojet and Hartung. In Brazil, the system was known as the Cougar Boy, with the same games as the Mega Duck. Ultimately, the hardware failed to significantly undercut the price of Nintendo's machine, and without the marketing budget or brand power to compete directly, the Mega Duck did not last long in the marketplace. Just 24 known cartridge releases exist. However, the hardware didn't disappear entirely, as Welback Holdings soon pivoted to take on Vtech in the educational toy market – not that this went a great deal better. ✱

Mega Duck fact

■ Except for *The Brick Wall* by Timlex International, all games for the Mega Duck were developed by the Taiwanese developer Thin Chen Enterprise, under the Sachen and Commin brand names.

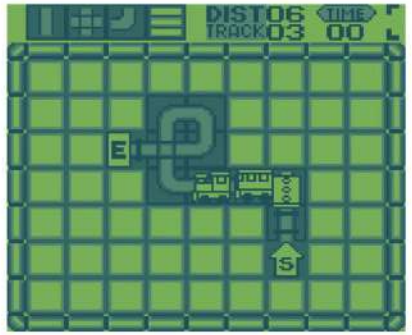
PROCESSOR: 8-BIT SHARP LR35902 CPU (4.19 MHZ)
RAM: 16KB RAM
GRAPHICS: 2.7-INCH 160X144 DISPLAY, FOUR SHADE GREYSCALE
AUDIO: TWO-CHANNEL STEREO SOUND
MEDIA: 36 PIN ROM CARTRIDGE
POWER: FOUR AA BATTERIES (15 HOURS PLAYTIME APPROX.)



ESSENTIAL GAME

Railway

This puzzler has quite a lot in common with the old *Pipe Mania* puzzle design. Your job is to use a random selection of track pieces to lay a complete line between preset start and end points – fail to connect them, and the train will crash. You'll gain points for quick track completion and lose them for wasting pieces. As play goes on, obstacles begin to appear that you'll need to build around, and minimum track length requirements start to complicate your designs. It's not the most original game, but it's a good take on an established template.



SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF

Conquests of Camelot and Conquests of the Longbow

THE PERFECT BLEND OF STORY, ACTION AND ADVENTURE, CHRISTY MARX'S CONQUESTS GAMES REPRESENT THE BEST SIERRA ON-LINE HAD TO OFFER IN ITS WILDLY INNOVATIVE NINETIES HEYDAY. HERE, THE CELEBRATED SCREENWRITER TELLS RETRO GAMER HOW SHE CRAFTED THESE UNDERAPPRECIATED GENRE CLASSICS

Words By Gem Wheeler

Sierra On-Line's graphic adventures are renowned among fans of the genre, but only true connoisseurs can name those lacking a 'Quest' in the title. That's a shame, as there are some hidden gems in the company's back catalogue, just waiting to be discovered by the more intrepid hunters for gaming treasure. Christy Marx's *Conquests Of Camelot* and *Conquests Of The Longbow* are two such titles.

» [Atari ST] Merlin will be your guide through thick and thin.

Christy, a successful screenwriter responsible for the animated series *Jem* and the comic book series *Sisterhood Of Steel*, brought complex storytelling, deep research and thoughtfully designed gameplay mechanics to her adventures in medieval legend. And yes, the word 'quest' is still in there... sort of. This is a Sierra game, after all.

Christy explains how her unexpected detour into the world of game design came about. "I was married at the time to an Australian artist by the name of Peter Ledger," she remembers. "Peter and I had been doing a lot of different projects – comic book projects and so forth – together, and one day we got a phone call from a headhunter who had been hired by Sierra On-Line to find artists that would be willing to come up and live in this tiny little mountain town of Oakhurst, which is just outside of Yosemite Park, and work on their games. We were having a very tough time, because there was a Writers'

The fruit has withered on the vine, grain dies of disease, while springs and wells turn foul. Your people cry out to you for a miracle.

» [Atari ST] Camelot is rather nice, apart from the blight that's slowly destroying it...

» [PC] Arrange passage to the Holy Land to track down your goal.

» [PC] Christy Marx's exhaustive research into Arthurian legend is remarkable.

» [PC] Merlin's chamber contains magical secrets.

» [Atari ST] There's a handy floor plan of Camelot to speed you on your way.

Your queen is the beautiful Gwenhyver, who loves you and whom you love dearly. Yet you know that her deepest and most passionate love is reserved for your greatest knight, Sir Launcelot.

Guild strike that had been going on forever, and it had hit us very hard. I've always wanted to jump at new opportunities, so even though I knew absolutely nothing about computer games and had never *played* a computer game, I said, 'Well, he might be interested, but are they also looking for writers?'" After meeting with Sierra's founders, Ken and Roberta Williams, the couple were quickly hired.

"The interesting thing about Sierra at the time was that there was no such thing as an established game designer role," Christy says. "They would hire just about anybody to design a game for them, which was pretty hysterical. When they wanted to do a *Police Quest* game, they hired Jim Walls, who was an actual policeman! Al Lowe [designer of the *Leisure Suit Larry* series and *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist*] was a programmer and musician. When they heard about my Hollywood background, writing for animation, TV and comics, that was bedazzling to them, and, of course, Peter was a fantastic artist." Christy was reluctant to develop a new IP, given that Sierra would keep control, so she insisted on working with an established property. The legends of King Arthur appealed to all involved and work soon began on *Conquests Of Camelot*, which was released in 1990.

> "I LOVE DOING RESEARCH! IT'S ONE OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS. THIS WAS PRE-WEB, SO IT WASN'T LIKE YOU COULD JUST GO AND GOOGLE SOMETHING"
>
> **CHRISTY MARX**

Christy's account of these productive days at the cutting edge of adventure game design captures Sierra's endearing spirit of invention. "It was a lot of fun, and the reason it was so much fun is because it was a time of innovation and exploration. Nothing was set," she remembers. "It was all so new, and everybody was still learning and figuring it out. When I got there, they gave me a team to run of animators and programmers and so forth. I knew absolutely nothing about designing a game, but nobody else did either, so I set about figuring it out on my own, which I did by going around to the other people there, like Roberta and Jim and Al and the *Space Quest* guys [Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe], and I said, 'Can you show me what game design looks like? What do you actually do?' So they gave me these documents, and they were all completely different! Nothing was consistent. Everybody just came up with their own way of doing it. I drafted what was essentially the first game design document, which contained everything: ▶

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT'S DIFFERENT VERSIONS COMPARE

ATARI ST

This version is clearly the least visually appealing of the three, with a flatter colour scheme, though the Atari's faster CPU had advantages for running speed. Tinny music adds to the sense of a lesser product, despite the popularity of Sierra's adventures on the mouse-driven platform.

AMIGA

Adventure game fans frequently bemoan the poor quality of Sierra's Amiga ports, as compared to those produced by its rival, LucasArts. *Conquests Of Camelot* is, unfortunately, no exception. It's a bit on the slow side, though the graphics are of about the same standard. The conversion's a little lacking in polish and is easily surpassed by its DOS PC equivalent.

PC

The original remains the best for both *Conquests Of Camelot* and *Conquests Of The Longbow* (the latter didn't get an ST port and has the same issues on the Amiga as the first game). Mark Seibert's score can be heard to its full effect, while the VGA graphics retain their colourful charm.

Legends of Valour

Where lore and gaming merge

Sharing the Round Table with you are noble warriors of the realm: Launcelot, Kay, Ector, Gareth, Percival, Gawaine, Galahad and many others.

The Grail Myth

If your knowledge of the *Holy Grail* begins and ends with *Monty Python*, fear not, lords and ladies: *Conquests Of Camelot* will set you on the path towards enlightenment. From Chrétien De Troyes to Malory, the sacred chalice is a crucial part of the Arthurian legend and is pivotal to Arthur's quest.

The Round Table

Arthur's Round Table is first mentioned by the Anglo-Norman poet Wace in his *Roman De Brut*, written in 1155. It's a useful bit of furniture, the shape of which maintains equality between the monarch and his brave knights. Shame about all the unfortunate business with the queen. On that note…

Arthur and Guinevere

Arthur's love for his consort, named Gwynhever here, is deep and undying, as is hers for him. Her passion for his most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, is of a different order. Thankfully, Arthur's bromance with the dashing fellow is ardent enough to keep things ticking over, most of the time.

▶ the elements of the story, a listing of maps, a listing of all the screens, all the animation assets, bios of all the characters. I put it in a three ring binder and presented it to them, and they'd never seen anything quite like it!"

Both *Conquests* games are rich in history, lore and detail. "I love doing research! It's one of my favourite things," says Christy. "This was pre-web, so it wasn't like you could just go and Google something. You had to actually go and… do your research! Buy books, read books, track stuff down the hard way." For *Conquests Of Camelot*, Christy drew heavily upon Geoffrey Of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a 12th-century chronicle that blends history and fiction in a sophisticated, politically resonant take on Britain's legendary past.

Peter Ledger's artistry lent a sensuous, romantic edge to the first game's Arthurian visuals. He didn't enjoy the process, however, and opted not to return for *Conquests Of The Longbow*. "He hated working on computer graphics! He was a gentleman, barbarian and hedonist, and someone who liked physical contact with art – painting or sculpting or carving leather," remembers Christy. "There were tremendous restrictions on the first game, where you only had 16 colours, and some of those were accomplished by dithering colours together. It was so limited that it drove him crazy. Consequently, he did not work on the second game at all. He said, 'That's it, I don't want to do it anymore!'" Peter was tragically killed in a car accident in 1994, aged just 49. He left behind him a legacy of achievement in comic art, among other media, that would lead to the foundation of Australia's Ledger Awards, created in his honour in 2004.

After the success of the first game, Christy was ready to get started on her chosen subject of ancient Greek mythology, with a specific focus on its goddesses. Roberta Williams, keen to capitalise on the popularity of Robin Hood on the big screen, had other ideas, but Christy politely ignored her suggestions. "Then a little more time goes by, and Roberta comes up to me, and she says, 'I had a dream last night, and you were working on a Robin Hood game!' The penny dropped, and I realised that, in their very clumsy way, what they were trying to say to me was, 'We really want you to do it!' So I said, 'Yeah, that's a really cool idea,' and at that point, I pivoted over to doing Robin Hood."

1991's *Conquests Of The Longbow* presented its own challenges, as Sierra shifted from the text-based SCI0 system to its object-based, mouse-driven SCI1 replacement. "With the text parser, you have to spend a lot of time thinking about all of the possible entries and answers, and working out a structure that goes from very specific to less specific to a sort of global response," says Christy. "It's a very different way of having to think about things, but it also gives you an awful lot more leeway, like doing riddles, for example, because I could count on people being able to type in the answer. I did come up with a workaround [for *Conquests Of The Longbow*] by coming upon something I found in my research, the druid hand code, which is probably nonsense. They could then just click on different parts of the hand to spell something, but it's a painstaking way to do something, so I wanted to keep it limited." It also provided an ingenious method of copy protection, as players who'd mislaid their copy of the manual would learn.

Once again, research was key to developing the game's compelling story. Christy contacted Nottingham Castle Trust's curators, who sent her drawings of the fortress's layout as it would have been in the 1190s, along with information on its underground tunnel network. That particular historical detail and its connection to Ye Olde Trip To Jerusalem pub played a crucial part in the game's plot, though it wasn't until years later that Christy had the chance to take a trip to Nottingham and visit the locations she'd brought to life on the screen.

In addition to some issues with the archery sequence, which Christy had to fight to get fixed in time for release, she clashed with art director Kenn Nishiuye over the game's music. He pushed for a more modern score, but composer Mark Seibert agreed with Christy

» [Amiga] The widow has some fun banter, as does her, er, sheep. Yes, really.

» [Amiga] King Richard The Lionheart isn't having a great year, to be honest.

» [PC] The object-based interface streamlines gameplay in *Conquests Of The Longbow*.

The Merry Men

Knights and outlaws are two sides of the same coin in medieval literature, and there's plenty of scope for soulful bonding in *Conquests Of The Longbow* with the appearance of Robin Hood's trusty band of rogues. Down a tankard with Little John and endure Alan-A-Dale's bad jokes like the legend you are.

St Mary's Abbey

The real St Mary's Abbey is actually located in York, but it's moved to Nottingham for *Longbow*. It features in many ballads of Robin Hood, along with its grasping abbot. Was he a real-life figure or a symbol of clerical avarice? Possibly a bit of both. That's history for you...

that a more period-appropriate soundtrack was the way forward. Unfortunately, some of the interesting strategic options Christy had hoped to include in the game fell victim to budget and time constraints. "I had in mind all these different sequences for the assault on the castle, where you can gain and lose followers. I had a complex system in mind for that, and it just had to be scaled back to almost nothing."

Like its precursor, *Conquests Of The Longbow* won both praise and awards. Sadly, there would be no more entries in the series. "I had signed up to do three games with them, so after I finished *Longbow*, I was feeling pretty burned out after all the years of very, very tough work on these two games," Christy laments. She settled on another medieval topic: the real-life conquests of Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne. Just as her research was getting underway, contractual negotiations hit a glitch. "They wanted me to sign up to do another three games after that one, which was great, but the negotiations did not go well, and they kept doing things that pissed me off. I walked away, which in retrospect was really stupid of me," she laughs. "I should have hung in and done it, but I was feeling like I needed to get out at that point."

Nonetheless, Christy retains fond memories of her days at the company, where she was one of several pioneering female game designers in an era that, as she notes, was distinguished by appointment based on creative merit rather than the cyclical hiring of tech bros by other tech bros. The diversity of talent at Sierra is a treasurable aspect of the company's history, and one for which it's rarely given credit.

Christy's departure, though, was Sierra's loss. While she has added to her impressive CV with credits on shows as diverse as *Babylon 5*, *Beast Wars: Transformers* and *Captain Simian And The Space Monkeys*, all while authoring a number of books and developing hidden object games for Zynga, her work at Sierra, alongside Peter Ledger and their talented teams, brought us two games that any fan of point-and-click adventures will be beguiled by. Legends, indeed. ★

> "I HAD SIGNED UP TO DO THREE GAMES WITH THEM, SO AFTER I FINISHED LONGBOW, I WAS FEELING PRETTY BURNED OUT AFTER ALL THE YEARS OF VERY, VERY TOUGH WORK ON THESE TWO GAMES"
>
> **Christy Marx**

» [PC] The archery minigame makes for a nice change of pace.

» [PC] Nottingham Castle is beautifully rendered.

» [Amiga] Interesting things happen on Watling Street, so look out.

Salamander 2

THERE'S ALWAYS A BIGGER FISH

» ARCADE » 1996 » KONAMI

I've played a lot of shmups in my time and as a result it can often be hard for the genre to surprise me. I remember playing *Salamander 2* for the first time back in the late Nineties, and while I was deeply impressed with the visuals that were being chucked around the screen, the mechanics certainly weren't that much of an improvement over those in Konami's original 1986 classic.

Ten years of separation between the two games certainly meant that *Salamander 2* was a strong assault on the eyes, thanks to its often garish colour schemes, neat transparency effects and gargantuan, detailed sprites. Konami's fastidious approach to replicating the key beats of the arcade original was also deeply pleasing, but mechanically, *Salamander 2* felt stale.

In fact, when Golem appeared halfway through the first stage, flailing at me with its familiar long clawed arms and eyeing me ominously with its single orb, I almost rolled my eyes at its appearance, humouring the huge floating brain as it made its way to the level's end, ready to stop my ship from continuing its journey, a voyage that was already feeling a little too familiar to me.

Approaching the end of the stage, *Salamander 2*'s music stepped up a gear, signifying to me that my battle with Golem was close to hand. I'd faced this boss countless times in the past, and I certainly wasn't threatened by the few lasers that were being spat towards me, but Golem wasn't a boss... Golem was a distraction. Without warning, a gigantic, many-eyed beast called Biter launched forwards, grabbing Golem in its huge maw and munching on it with so much ferocity that Golem's limp arms were soon the only indication that it had ever floated in front of me.

Biter's epic entrance immediately shook me from my complacency and proved that even though I thought I had Konami's new game pegged, it still had plenty of tricks up its sleeve. Needless to say, I eventually sought out a copy for my Saturn and it remains in my collection to this day. ✱

57300
PRESS
START

PICTURE PERFECT

WITH CATHODE-RAY TUBE TVS OUT OF PRODUCTION AND DWINDLING IN NUMBER, RETRO GAMES MUST INEVITABLY BE PLAYED ON NEWER DISPLAYS. BUT IS THIS COSTING US VITAL VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GAMES WE LOVE – AND IF SO, WHAT CAN WE DO TO PRESERVE THEM?

NICK THORPE

Let's not kid ourselves – as far as most of the world is concerned, the humble cathode-ray tube television is obsolete. They're heavy, they're often as deep as they are tall and they aren't particularly energy efficient. The vast majority of them were only intended to show standard-definition TV signals, too. Modern TVs can be large enough to display a life-size human diagonally yet still hang on your wall, they have more pixels than your family has had hot dinners, and you don't even have to plug anything into them to watch YouTube. But they have one nasty little flaw – they're terrible for nostalgia. Hook up a classic console or computer to your LCD TV and you may well be left wondering if your old games really

[N64] With no native RGB support and a deliberately blurred output, the N64 is a console that needs modding for sharp images.

MINI MELEE

How well do the major mini consoles fare in terms of image options? We rank them from worst to first

PLAYSTATION MINI

Sony's console forces a bilinear filter giving a blurry look to most games, though high-res games like *Tekken 3* fare better. There are no options at all, so you're stuck with the default look.

NEO GEO MINI

On its built-in LCD display, SNK's effort is sharp and vivid. But the TV output has a forced bilinear filter, and the only optional extra is an added smoothing effect that looks even worse.

PC ENGINE MINI

Many games suffer from shimmering scrolling due to uneven scaling in 4:3 mode, and the CRT filter is pretty dark and blurry. The PC Engine GT mode is a nice novelty, though.

looked *that* bad. What's more, you probably won't be able to escape the nagging feeling that games just don't *feel* right.

The good news is that you're not imagining things – modern TVs really do make old games look and feel worse, at least on original hardware. "At first I was somewhat blind to what other small pieces of the classic console experience were being eroded away as I bought newer and newer displays," says Marc Duddleson of the YouTube channel *My Life In Gaming*. "It wasn't until I learned about RGB video, upscalers and PVMs that I realised that yes, input lag is real; yes, the consoles are treated very differently on proper 15kHz CRTs; and no, TV manufacturers don't care about optimising the gaming experience, especially for outdated analogue output consoles." That last part is key. While TV manufacturers put a lot of thought into how to handle the wealth of standard-definition content that's still out there, their choices are always made with film and TV images in mind. Because of that, most TVs have internal scaling systems that have a bias towards smoothing, meaning that pixel art loses definition and appears blurry. Another problem is that consoles didn't adhere to video standards of the day, outputting a low-resolution progressive image that most TVs will treat as an interlaced image, which leads to visual artefacts such as horizontal lines where you should see rapidly flashing sprites. Worse yet, all that processing introduces a noticeable delay between your button presses and visual response, a phenomenon known as 'input lag'.

But if that's the case, surely the way to make our games look good is to simply bypass low-resolution analogue video and play them in high definition on devices designed to output to modern displays? Unfortunately it's not that clear cut either. There are plenty of people who feel that a CRT display is crucial to the look of a retro game, and some argue that by simply showing razor-sharp pixels, many emulated games – and indeed, this magazine – misrepresent the original intent of the graphic artists. "I tend to agree, at least in the case of home console games through the Nintendo 64 era," says TroggleMonkey, the author of the popular RetroArch shader 'crt-royale'. "Not only did every console gamer at the time use a CRT screen (except for the occasional projection screen or rear-projection TV), but the artists knew that and authored their pixel art accordingly. We didn't start thinking of Mario, Link, or Samus in terms of sharp, blocky pixels until the console emulator craze started taking off on PC in the late Nineties."

CRT display advocates feel that the imprecise nature of old analogue video signals, the scanline effect and even the aperture grille on the TV itself are integral to the proper presentation of retro games. Indeed, there are plenty of images showing developers working with a computer monitor and a consumer CRT side by side, and it's easy to see ways in which artists designed their work with the limitations of old display technologies in mind. The most obvious example is the use of dithering, pixel patterns that would blend in composite video to create the illusion of extra colours and even transparency effects. Certain types of graphics can benefit greatly from the CRT look, including higher detail pixel art and particularly digitised sprites, and these can be persuasive examples in favour of the argument that chasing the CRT look is the only way to preserve the experience intended by developers.

However, the big problem is that people's experiences of gaming on a CRT can vary enormously. Firstly, it's important to note that the console itself can play an important part of determining how a game looks, as some systems have distinctive quirks, like the N64's blurring or the Mega Drive's dreadful composite output. It gets more complex when you recognise that different production runs and motherboard revisions of consoles can also deliver drastically different results – just ask any SNES enthusiast that has spent time hunting for the 1CHIP motherboard. Secondly, the type and quality of your cables plays a part. In the beginning, many ▶

[PC] Some modern releases even include multiple CRT options, recognising the lack of a singular 'true' experience.

[Atari 2600] Early consoles only output RF video – tremendously noisy and fuzzy, but details weren't fine enough to be lost.

[NES] Composite video was an improvement over RF, but still proved to be rather imprecise.

[NES] When emulating *Darkwing Duck*, it's possible to see window details that are all but lost in composite.

CAPCOM HOME ARCADE

While there's some shimmering here in 4:3 mode, the system's 1080p output reduces its impact. Display options are weak, with only a smoothing filter on offer – no CRT options at all.

MEGA DRIVE MINI

Most games look good by default, with no pixel shimmering problems. However, M2 did both the Mega Drive Mini and PC Engine Mini, so the CRT effect is equally underwhelming.

NINTENDO CLASSIC MINI: SNES

While this offers a pixel-perfect mode, the 4:3 option also avoids shimmering pixels thanks to light interpolation. The CRT mode is a bit on the subtle side.

THEC64 MINI

The CRT effect here is just as subtle as on Nintendo's system – faint scanlines and some light blurring. However, the option to choose pixel-perfect, PAL and NTSC aspect ratios wins the day.

[Mega Drive] Some artists turned limitations to their advantage – take a look at the dithered light pattern here.

[Mega Drive] On real hardware, low-quality video output allows the pixels to blend together into a convincing transparency effect.

[GX4000] *Switchblade* has a distinct look, employing the GX4000's high-resolution, low colour mode.

[GX4000] This screenshot from real hardware shows that that approach doesn't benefit much from scanlines and blur.

systems typically supported video over RF and nothing else, but by the end of the Eighties they had started to incorporate support for composite AV cables, as well as higher quality S-Video and RGB SCART. RGB SCART in particular was prized by importers for TV compatibility reasons. By the turn of the century, VGA and component cables gave players additional high-quality options to play with. Lastly, there's your display itself. Higher quality consumer CRTs offer sharper images and flatter screens, while individual scanlines tend to be more distinct as your display size increases.

With that in mind, without information on the equipment used it's easier to say what the artists didn't see than what they did see. "While pixel artists used their CRT screens as a guide, that's not to say they really 'mastered' their work to any exact standard," says TroggleMonkey. "Their screens drastically varied in sharpness, scanline strength, phosphor patterns, etc, but probably none of them presented the image as a grid of sharp pixels." Even then, we do know that those sharp pixels were not alien to the developers. Some graphics were drawn exactly that way, such as the graph paper representations of Pac-Man, and old photographs show artists editing zoomed images of their sprites. Ultimately, to know the intentions of artists would require extensive documentation and research that would be impossible to put together today. Even then developers sent their products out into the wild, knowing that players would have vastly different setups at home.

In the absence of a single 'correct' answer, the CRT-less player is ultimately left to decide how to display their games on modern TVs. A quick Twitter poll indicated that around two thirds of our followers prefer sharp pixels, only correcting for aspect ratio. Thankfully, this means that the majority of players are usually well-catered for by today's retro gaming products, as the days of forced blur filters are mostly behind us. The only major worry comes from scaling, as it can be tricky to scale the various resolutions used in old games to 4:3 on a modern set. Unless you can scale the image by an exact multiple of its original resolution on each axis – a practice known as integer scaling – uneven pixel widths give a 'shimmering' effect during scrolling, which wouldn't be present on a CRT. This can be remedied with some light interpolation, at the cost of slightly softer pixel edges you may not notice at a distance.

But for the other third who prefer to use filters and shaders, the news is mixed. The good news is that most retro gaming products on modern hardware do offer some attempt to mimic the CRT look. The bad news is that there is no consensus about what constitutes a good recreation of a CRT, and that visual display options in most official releases often leave a lot to be desired. "In official retro game compilations (or retro-styled indie games), the scanline or CRT simulation effects are poorly implemented more often than not. It blows my mind that sometimes they're just horizontal lines laid over the image that don't even align to the pixel grid! They'll just go straight through the middle of some pixels," says Marc. "There's a pretty decent 'dirty CRT' look in the M2 *Sega Ages* on Switch, at least the ones I've tried. It's okay but not amazing in any of the mini consoles, in my opinion. The *Sega Genesis Classics Collection* on modern consoles has a really bad scanline overlay." Better work is being done by independent developers. "I enjoy when indie games like *Blazing Chrome* or *Fight'N Rage* have options that let you go super over-the-top with the grunginess, glow and CRT curvature. If you're gonna have an artificial CRT look in a game, then I'd say let's go all the way in making it look like composite video on a typical not-amazing consumer CRT. Even though I prefer RGB for my real consoles, there is a certain texture to the 'dirty' CRT look that I enjoy, too."

[SNES] There's nothing quite like a real CRT, with the distinctive appearance of the aperture grille and signature glow.

[SNES] That said, modern CRT shaders like crt-royale in RetroArch manage to come surprisingly close.

As is so often the case in the retro gaming scene, the community is doing the best work when it comes to older games. Emulators have come a long way in their ability to mimic a CRT, with RetroArch in particular well-known for its shaders, including crt-royale. "The specific idea first came to me because I wanted to use it personally. At the time I didn't have enough space for my real CRT, and I had been following the development of other programmers' CRT shaders on byuu's emulator forum for quite some time," says TroggleMonkey. "From the start, I knew I personally wanted to recreate the look of more than just one CRT. I was curious about roughly matching both the look of the TVs I actually used as a kid, as well as what my 'dream TV' would have been." The result was that the shader was made highly customisable. "There are a handful of characteristic 'looks' based on what technologies the manufacturer used, as well as myriad minor variations within each style, not to mention the image controls that people would set differently to taste. I've read 4chan comments saying that crt-royale looks nothing like a (or at least their favourite) CRT. That seems to illustrate

TAKE YOUR PICK

THE COMPREHENSIVE COMPARISON YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR!

This image, from the Mega Drive version of *WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game*, was chosen as our basis for comparison as it allows us to see how a variety of different image elements are affected by our choice of display technology. For fairness, we used the same PAL Mega Drive II and cables for each hardware capture, and the same cartridge across all tests.

It's first important to look at how cable type affects the image before it's even displayed. RGB preserves the sharpness of the art, which makes text look nicer, while the way the colours blend together via composite creates the illusion of greater colour depth, helping the digitised photo. The pixel art background elements depend rather more on personal taste. Simulations of cable types should be aiming for something like these images before any other effects are added.

UNFILTERED

RGB

COMPOSITE

FUSION 3.64

SETTINGS

Scanlines 75%
CVBS mode

This emulator is still highly useful despite last being updated in 2010, but its default filters are pretty basic by today's standards. The scanline effect is uniform across the image, and the composite video simulation doesn't have any of the rainbow fringing seen on our images from the real console.

OSSC

SETTINGS

Scanline strength: 75%
Scanline hybrid strength: 75%

This popular scaling device offers hybrid scanlines that vary in intensity based on the surrounding colours, providing a more natural look which is quite appealing. When we add the RetroTINK 2X for composite support, which the OSSC doesn't offer itself, the artefacts are obviously fully authentic.

RETROARCH

SETTINGS

Borders: Top/bottom
Shader preset: crt-royale
Geometry mode: 2.00

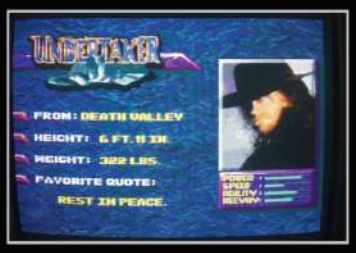
We're using the Genesis Plus GX core here. The default crt-royale shader looks great. Using crt-royale-ntsc-256px-composite, the artefacts don't look quite like those from real hardware, but do come closer than Fusion. The Geometry setting adds curvature, to more closely match our real CRT.

14-INCH WHARFEDALE CRT

SETTINGS

N/A

The small size and less precise nature of the CRT display helps the two video cables look like a closer match. You can still see rainbow fringing on composite, but RGB doesn't look quite as sharp as it does via direct capture to an LCD screen. On a larger display, the difference will be more visible.



THE ULTIMATE CRT

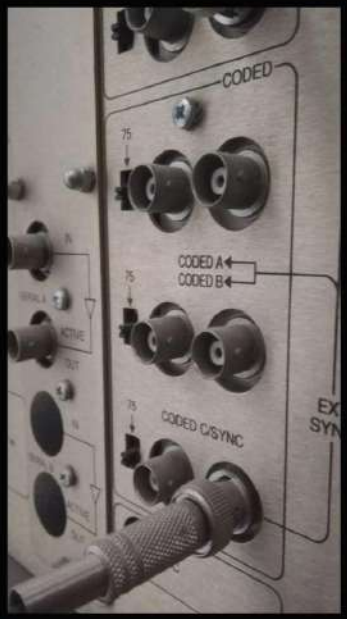
WHY ARE PEOPLE TURNING TO PROFESSIONAL VIDEO MONITORS, AND WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW BEFORE YOU JOIN THEM?

There's a good chance that if you've hung around the hardcore hardware enthusiasts of our community for a little while, you'll have heard people talking about PVMs. Technically, the term refers to a range of professional video monitors by Sony, but the term is now generalised to include models by other manufacturers. These CRT monitors were designed to be used in broadcasting and other industries in which image quality was a necessity, but are now considered surplus to requirements. As a result, many professional monitors have found their way into the hands of retro gamers, who prize the precision and sharp scanlines of the displays – just look at the images from Darran's own PVM at the top of the page.

Before you run out and buy one, there are some important things to bear in mind as professional monitors aren't as simple as consumer models. Firstly, you should check to ensure that the monitor actually accepts video over RGB. Once you've determined that it does, you'll need to do some research online to see if it will accept sync over composite video as used in many RGB SCART cables, or if you'll need what is a 'sync stripper' – a circuit that extracts a suitable sync signal from composite video, which can be integrated into cables and switch boxes. You'll need to purchase an adapter to convert SCART to the specialised BNC inputs found on these monitors, and since you're unlikely to have many inputs available, you should probably look into getting a good SCART switcher too.

Even with the right knowledge, you should exercise caution when buying professional monitors as they are now quite expensive unless you get lucky. These are heavy, bulky devices that most people won't send via post – you'll likely need to find one for local pick-up. When you do head out, it's worth asking the seller to let you see the device in action, especially if you're worried about compatibility with any of your hardware. Due to the age of the monitors, they may well need some service before long, so if you're not confident in working with CRT displays you should know who you'll contact for repairs in advance.

» You'll need to pick up a BNC adapter. Your consoles won't just plug directly into a PVM like they would a regular TV.



» PVM owners also have to care about sync signals, a hassle not usually faced by gamers using other types of displays.

Thanks to Martin Hinson for supplying the BNC cable photos

how wide the gamut is, or how much I got everything wrong... one of the two."

Elsewhere in the community, skilled engineers are recreating classic hardware using FPGA technology. Consoles like Analogue's Super Nt and Mega Sg include options such as regular and hybrid scanlines, and on the Mega Sg a dither blending option. Then there's the open source MiSTer project, which covers a variety of consoles. "It's more of a DIY thing that requires putting together a lot of pieces, and setting it up might seem complicated at first," says Marc. "But if you don't have access to all of the consoles that you'd like to play and can't justify the rising cost of classic games, but still want to play in an environment that operates similarly to the original hardware, then the MiSTer handles both the consoles and quality scaling in a single device."

Of course, you may wish to hang on to your original hardware, and there are ways to make your old consoles more compatible with modern TVs and get a CRT-style look at the same time. Unfortunately, this is where things can start to get a little expensive. One way to do it is to modify your consoles for HDMI output. Mods such as Hi-Def NES, UltraHDMI for N64 and DCHDMI for Dreamcast not only give you a digital output better suited to a modern TV, they can also add scanlines and other effects – and the results can be great. "When playing on a real console, by far the best artificial scanlines I've ever seen are the 'retro' preset in the Ultra HDMI mod for N64," says Marc.

» [PlayStation] Many players experienced images like this, as composite cables were commonly bundled with consoles.

» [PlayStation] However, AV enthusiasts and importers prized RGB SCART, which was clearer and made importing easier.

» [Xbox One] Compilations like *Rare Replay* now offer CRT simulation options, but the effect can be overblown.

"This is an impressively close approximation of the PVM look, complete with a bit of bloom that slightly expands the image depending on the brightness." However, these kits can cost upwards of £100, and that doesn't include installation.

An alternative approach would be to invest in an external scaling device that is designed for retro games. These accept old analogue video connections and output HDMI, and unlike your TV's internal scaler they offer proper support for low resolutions, display sharp pixels and minimise input lag. Many of these devices include options to mimic the CRT look, such as scanlines and smoothing, including the Open Source Scan Converter, the RetroTINK 2X Pro and the XRGB-Mini Framemeister. This can be a more cost-effective solution if you have plenty of consoles, but getting top image quality generally requires RGB and component cables. That can be quite an investment if you don't already own them, and you'll still require mods to get RGB output when dealing with consoles like the PC Engine or N64. Also, the Framemeister is discontinued and costs quite a bit these days, but is still preferred by some for its high-quality deinterlacing of 480i images, such as those produced by the PlayStation 2.

It can be a daunting field of products for newcomers, but there are some good beginner-friendly options out there. "I think the best starter products out there are the RetroTINK series by Mike Chi," says Marc. "He makes a variety of lag-free scalers that allow you to use composite, S-Video, component, and RGB – you just have to pick the one that supports the signals that you need the most. For example, people who want to play N64 without modifying their console can play in S-Video through a RetroTINK, but the OSSC, which only supports RGB and YPbPr, doesn't allow for composite or S-Video without an add-on like the Koryuu. Systems like the PS2, which almost always output interlaced video, can be smoothed with the RetroTINK output to make the geometry edges look softer and for the interlaced flicker to be less pronounced." However, Marc does point out that for the more adventurous, the alternative can be quite enticing. "If you're ready to commit to RGB and component, then the OSSC is actually not that expensive these days – it's gone way down in price and is not that much more than the RetroTINK products. The OSSC can be *a lot* sharper than the RetroTINK and you have access to much more robust scanline options, but you can go much further with unmodified consoles with RetroTINKs."

» [Dreamcast] Not every console needs simulated fuzz – this near-pristine image was taken from a real Dreamcast via VGA.

» [Dreamcast] For comparison, this screenshot of *Crazy Taxi* was taken using an emulator. Hard to tell apart, aren't they?

But while we can lay out all the options, only you can decide if chasing the CRT look works for you – or if you even want to move to modern LCD displays. "I enjoy both raw pixels and scanlines, I don't see either as superior," says Marc. "Most people are simply going to choose CRT or HDMI, and either choice is totally fine. I don't prefer one over the other. Both provide excellent results if you have the right equipment, and the bigger factor should be which choice is more convenient and cost-effective for your own setup." And despite having created an excellent CRT shader, TroggleMonkey still prefers the vintage technology. "I'd use crt-royale more myself, but I'm enjoying the simplicity of a physical console these days, and I finally have the space for it," he tells us. "I usually play my physical Super Nintendo on my 36-inch Sony WEGA now. A lot of people like PVMs better, but sometimes quantity equals quality, the same way a 28oz porterhouse steak beats a 9oz filet mignon." Despite his own preference for CRTs, he's a strong advocate of following your own aesthetic sensibilities. "In the end, nobody is obligated to care about artist intent at all. You'll have more fun playing with the filters you like, than the ones someone else elaborately justifies." ✱

» [Mega Drive] Modern TVs typically butcher retro games with soft scaling and indiscriminately applied smoothing effects.

» [Mega Drive] Using the OSSC, we get considerably greater clarity – and can then add scanlines.

» [Mega Drive] This photo, taken from a high-end consumer CRT TV, shows how prominent scanlines can be.

» [Mega Drive] Applying artificial scanlines to an image displayed via LCD can replicate the look reasonably well.

Minority Report

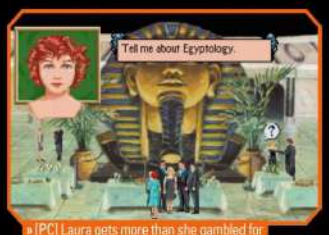
INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

MS-DOS

As a gaming platform, MS-DOS arguably punched above its weight. But, as the golden age of adventure gaming made way for the golden age of PC gaming, many of the platform's greatest gems slipped between the cracks

Words by Hareth Al Bustani

» [PC] Not quite a pumpkin coach, but Laura's got to get to the ball somehow. Though, you'd be surprised what can be found in a dirty taxi.



» [PC] Laura gets more than she gambled for at the museum's charity fundraiser, where a search for a missing dagger turns up a string of corpses.

THE DAGGER OF AMON RA

■ DEVELOPER: **SIERRA ON-LINE** ■ YEAR: **1992**

■ **The sequel to 1989's mystery title *The Colonel's Bequest*, *The Dagger Of Amon Ra* is a lesser known point-and-click thriller developed by Sierra On-Line during the genre's golden age.** Set in 1926, the game stars former journalism student Laura Bow, who has not only graduated but, much to everyone's shock, been employed by the *New York Daily Register News Tribune*. For her first assignment, she is tasked with investigating the theft of the ancient Egyptian Dagger Of Amon Ra from the Leyendecker Museum. Things escalate, however, when Laura begins snooping around at one of the museum's socialite soirees – a charity fundraiser, where she unearths a string of murders. From severed heads to bodies impaled on porcupines, things continue to escalate, until Laura is able to identify the culprit.

In many respects, *Amon Ra* can be seen as a spiritual successor to Ken and Roberta Williams' groundbreaking 1980 title, *Mystery House*, which pioneered the graphic adventure genre as a whole. However, for *Amon Ra*, Roberta handed the creative reigns to Bruce Balfour, who previously worked on the cyberpunk thriller *Neuromancer* and Brian Fargo's legendary *Wasteland*. Building on *The Colonel's Bequest*'s interface, the game replaces its predecessor's text-based command system with simple point-and-click mechanics. Typically, asking questions is crucial to solving puzzles, and genre veterans may find it frustrating having to navigate through Laura's diary to begin each conversation. However, Sierra was still experimenting with interfaces, and the diary is a novel concept.

The game does a wonderful job of worldbuilding, sprinkling tropes from the era across the entire game. With the prohibition in full swing, Laura must first figure out a password before visiting the local speakeasy. Inside, a live band croons through the swinging number, *The Archaeologist Song*: "I want to marry an archaeologist and keep his artefacts warm." Meanwhile in the toilets, a flapper eagerly awaits her aristocratic female lover, amused at Laura's seeming naivety.

The game makes somewhat of a progressive statement by instead opting to star an accomplished woman, and the conservative

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

HI-RES ADVENTURE #1: MYSTERY HOUSE

ON-LINE SYSTEMS, 1980

■ If you're keen to see where it all started, check out Roberta and Ken Williams' pioneering *Mystery House*. Though far less sophisticated than Sierra's later titles, it laid the groundwork for all graphic adventures to come. Plus, its mystery thriller setting is in keeping with Laura Bow's own adventures.

THE COLONEL'S BEQUEST

SIERRA ON-LINE, 1993

■ In Roberta Williams' first Laura Bow adventure, the inquisitive Southern belle is still a doe-eyed journalism student, hurled into the deep end when her friend invites her to stay at her uncle Colonel Henri Dijon's mansion. There, a family feud breaks out over the Colonel's will – one that soon culminates in murder.

NIPPON SAFES INC

DYNABITE, 1992

■ For those looking to step on the other side of the law, *Nippon Safes Inc* is a fun adventure centred on a goofy team of safe crackers each with a unique set of skills. Like *Day Of The Tentacle*, players control one character at a time, as they sneak their way through the colourful backstreets of Tokyo.

1920s context allows for a deeper exploration of this theme. After Laura introduces herself, the police chief comments, "You can't be a reporter, lass. You're a girl. The *Trib* only hires men." Though, unfortunately this progress is hampered by the presence of a stereotypical Chinese laundry manager, Lo Fat, who espouses some questionable dialogue.

The game features some brilliant artwork and animations for the time. At the end of the game, Laura has to answer a series of questions correctly to the coroner to unlock the 'good' ending to the game. However, it wouldn't be a Sierra adventure without the risk of death, and answering these questions incorrectly can lead to a 'bad' ending – with Laura being brutally shot to death in her bed.

IN DEPTH

CHIT CHAT

■ Asking plenty of questions is always a good start to any adventure game, but for a journalist like Laura Bow, it's absolutely essential. Laura can engage in simple conversations, or probe a little deeper.

FROM POINT TO CLICK

■ Amon Ra gives its interface a dramatic overhaul, upgrading from a text-based system to an interactive point-and-click one. Right-clicking allows players to quickly toggle between action types.

TAXI DRIVER

■ During the game's first act, taxis are a crucial lifeline – and apparently in New York, they're free for journalists with a valid press pass. Some even contain helpful items.

DEAR DIARY

■ Like any reporter worth their salt, Laura keeps tabs on all the game's major topics – though this system can be somewhat laborious to navigate through.

Minority Report

DUNE

■ DEVELOPER: **CRYO INTERACTIVE** ■ YEAR: **1992**

■ **A curious strategy-adventure game hybrid, *Dune* is a fascinating adaptation of Frank Herbert's legendary space-opera novel.** The game takes place on the planet of Arrakis – the only place in the universe where the precious commodity, Melange (commonly called 'spice'), can be found. Among other benefits, spice is a psychoactive substance, which allows people to see through spacetime, making it a most valuable resource for interstellar travel. However, mining spice is a dangerous process, one that attracts giant, destructive sandworms.

Players control Paul Atreides, whose family has been given the rights to mine spice, triggering a feud with House Harkonnen. The game resembles an adventure title, as Paul navigates the hidden recesses of his palace, interacting with people, and learning about the planet. However, he is soon forced to begin building alliances with the indigenous Fremen people, in a struggle to gain control over the planet's resources.

Paul flies from place to place aboard a vehicle known as an ornithopter, meeting Fremen and having them send their men out to prospect and mine spice, and later carry out military operations. Paul gradually develops a set of psychic powers, such as being able to summon and ride atop sandworms, and communicate with allies from vast distances.

The game is deceptively complex, and takes a while to truly comprehend. But, thankfully, for a 1992 title, the graphics are stunning – the developers have done a tremendous job of bringing the planet to life. The first time a sandworm bursts from the dunes, it feels suitably momentous. Coupled with a rousing score, *Dune* comes together as a one-of-a-kind immersive experience.

» [PC] Part of the game resembles an adventure title, as Paul interacts with his palace household, discovering his special abilities.

» [PC] Much of *Dune* is spent meeting with indigenous Fremen tribes, and building their trust, in order to gain access to their coveted followers.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» IGNITION

■ DEVELOPER: **UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS AB**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ This riotous racing game features a ludicrous array of vehicles – ranging from school buses to monster trucks and ambulances to police cars. The action takes place across a variety of diverse landscapes, from precarious alpine slopes to tropical sandy beaches. However, they're all fittingly chaotic and, short of actually winning, there's nothing more satisfying than ramming a rival racer off a cliff, to their fiery demise.

» BUD TUCKER IN DOUBLE TROUBLE

■ DEVELOPER: **MERIT STUDIOS**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ Like a cross between *Day Of The Tentacle* and *Leisure Suit Larry*, Bud Tucker stars as a pizza delivery boy tasked with rescuing a quirky inventor and his cloning machine. Amazingly, the game actually allows players to switch between a LucasArts or Sierra-style interface. Paired with some strong voice acting, with Rik Mayall as the villain, the absurdist dialogue will often have you laughing off your seat.

» THE POLITICALLY INCORRECT ADVENTURES OF GEWT NINGRICH

■ DEVELOPER: **TERRA SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ This satirical take on US politics is a beat-'em-up starring Gewt Ningrich, an obvious parody of Republican Newt Gingrich. Gewt works his way from level to level, raising money by clubbing seals, killing hippies, cutting down trees and shooting journalists at press conferences, with the aim of overthrowing the government.

» CURSE OF ENCHANTIA

■ DEVELOPER: **CORE DESIGN LTD**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ An innovative adventure game, *Curse Of Enchantia* features a text-free interface and little dialogue. Instead, the game uses a clever set of controls to tackle a wide variety of obstacles and puzzles. Although some require great stretches of logic, the creative puzzles will push even veteran adventurers to their limits. Stunning graphics do justice to the inspired, albeit bizarre, world – making this one of the genre's greats.

SIMANT

■ DEVELOPER: **MAXIS SOFTWARE** ■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Work, breed, fight. Forage, nurse, dig. It's not easy being an ant – where roles are predetermined, and life is a never-ending toil. Nowhere is this clearer than *SimAnt*, an innovative little simulator that thrusts the fate of a colony of black ants into your hands. In short, the aim is to grow the colony, kill the loathed red ants and, eventually, infest a nearby house.

SimAnt features a number of interweaving systems, all controlled via an elaborate interface – with creatures even reacting to one another's various pheromone trails. From breeding cycles, to behaviour management, players must adapt to the ever-changing situation. The landscape is not only littered with rival red ant colonies, but all manner of ravenous monsters – such as the dreaded tarantula.

The ants adhere to a caste system, and players must maintain a healthy ratio of breeder, worker and soldier ants. They can also determine whether the ants should focus on nursing, foraging or digging – as the colony grows, the game turns into a delicate balancing act.

When it's necessary to launch a pre-emptive attack on a rival colony, players can switch bodies with a soldier ant and summon an army of followers. The endgame is to burrow across the garden to a nearby house, where a hapless gentleman spends his days snacking and playing with his dog. *SimAnt*'s Will Wright claims the game inspired his later hit *The Sims*, and though it's far clunkier than its spiritual successor, the parallels are striking.

» [PC] For an ant, navigating a world riddled with dangers, there is something to be said about power in numbers.

» [PC] Avoiding the enemy is only half the battle. One must also maintain adequate food supplies, and a standing army.

RETRO STINKER

» BARBIE: SUPER MODEL

■ TAHOE SOFTWARE PRODUCTIONS ■ 1993

■ Barely a 'game', this series of mundane tasks assumes girls enjoy playing lazy dress-up, catwalk and make-up minigames – chores that are strung together by awful driving and rollerblading sequences.

» EČSTATICA

■ DEVELOPER: **ANDREW SPENCER STUDIOS**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ One of the weirdest games to grace DOS PCs – think of a sloppy, psychotic *Dark Souls*. Players have to liberate a cursed Medieval village, where Satan's monsters are impaling and crucifying residents one by one. Yet, as sinister as it is, at the end of the game, instead of fighting the devil, players can make a pact with him, and spend eternity being spoiled by a harem of half-naked manservants. It must be experienced to be truly appreciated.

» ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS II

■ DEVELOPER: **KOEI**
■ YEAR: **1989**

■ Long before *Total War: Three Kingdoms*, Koei developed the OG *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms*. Set during the chaotic collapse of China's Han Dynasty, this suitably grandiose take on the epic – like its *Total War* counterpart – lets players choose either a historically accurate or fictional game mode. Diplomacy, warfare, development and, of course, luck are all crucial to uniting a fractured China beneath your yoke.

» BIO MENACE

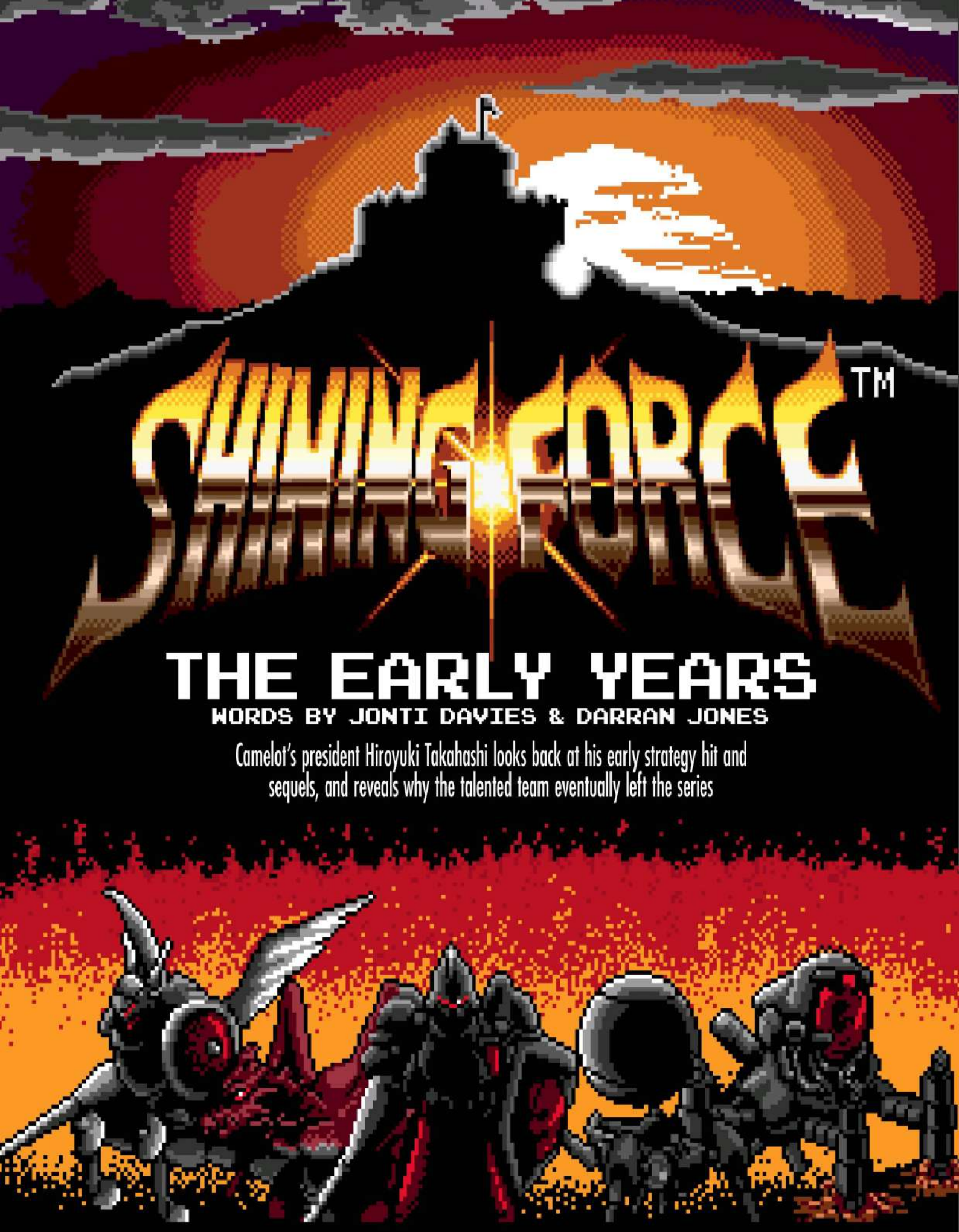
■ DEVELOPER: **APOGEE**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ Developed by Apogee's James Norwood, this ultraviolent side-scroller is all about grit – buildings are littered with corpses, and streets are dressed in burned-out vehicles. Players control Snake Logan, who has to save the city from a mad scientist, and his army of mutants and robots. To complete levels, Snake must not just blow mutants into meaty pieces with an array of weapons, but solve puzzles – making full use of the *Commander Keen* engine.

» THE HORDE

■ DEVELOPER: **TOYS FOR BOB**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ When a young servant called Chauncey saves the king's life, he's rewarded with a fief and a magical sword. The only catch? He has to defend his new land from insatiable hordes of red monsters. Between invasions, players can build up and reinforce their village, before personally taking on legions of ravenous beasts. With a huge array of tricks and traps to play with, and varied landscapes and enemies, this one has loads of replay value.



THE EARLY YEARS

WORDS BY JONTI DAVIES & DARRAN JONES

Camelot's president Hiroyuki Takahashi looks back at his early strategy hit and sequels, and reveals why the talented team eventually left the series

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT, CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **GENRE:** STRATEGY RPG

It shouldn't have been this complicated. From the outside looking in, *Shining Force* throughout the Nineties represented everything that was great about Sega: a 'big' Sega property and a unique calling card for the Mega Drive and Saturn, it delivered some of the finest deep tactical role-playing of the decade. Yet while the series' course through to *Shining Force III* led mesmerised players to a vast holy land of blissful RPG perfection, Sega's treatment of the games and its second-party developer, Camelot, only went from bad to rotten.

Prior to collaborating with Sega on the development of 1991's preparatory dungeon-crawler *Shining In The Darkness*, Hiroyuki Takahashi had been in employment at Enix, working on the *Dragon Quest* series of games and in particular making a significant contribution to the production of *Dragon Quest IV*. After that, he left Square Enix, went independent, formed his own company and soon began work on *Shining In The Darkness*. As Takahashi clarifies, "I was never an employee of Sega, but from *Darkness* on I worked as game designer and team leader on the *Shining Force* series. My younger brother Shugo wasn't a Sega employee, either."

If it sounds like Takahashi's keen to distance himself from Sega it's because he is. There's a whole litany of hurt to relate, but for a start consider this: for each of the three *Shining* Mega Drive games, Sega gave Takahashi's team the bare minimum funding offered to out-of-house developers. *Shining In The Darkness* was a success, but apparently not enough to merit a raise for the development of *Shining Force*; and although *Shining Force* was a hit, there was still no raise forthcoming when it came time for a sequel to be built. There is more, but in the interests of chronology let's return to the story of the series' conception.

Shining Force was launched in March 1992. "At that time, the games industry's way of thinking about role-playing games put the emphasis squarely on telling an interesting story," Takahashi laments. "That was apparently the purpose of role-playing games – just to tell a good story. However, I've always believed that engaging battles are the most crucial factor in a role-playing game. Even today, you see many role-playing games that are designed according to a philosophy where battles are just a bonus and the story is the main thing. I could never accept that and I wouldn't go along with it. RPG players spend such a great amount of their time in battle that there's no way a battle system should be treated merely as something that's tacked onto a good story."

» [Mega Drive] The *Shining* series' easy-to-understand icon menus made it one of the most user-friendly RPGs of all time.

> **I BELIEVE ENGAGING BATTLES ARE THE MOST CRUCIAL FACTOR IN AN RPG**
> HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LANDSTALKER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: 1992
YEAR: MEGA DRIVE

FELONY 11-79
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

DINOSAUR KING
SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS
YEAR: 2007

» [PC] The early PC game *Silver Ghost* helped Takahasi's team lay the groundwork for *Shining Force*.

» [Mega Drive] The *Shining* world isn't one for equal opportunities, unfortunately. All elves tend to be archers ,and all women are magic users.

» [Game Gear] They lacked town exploration but the Game Gear releases provided a healthy dose of portable strategy gaming nonetheless. A remake is long-overdue.

» [Game Gear] *Shining Force Gaiden: Final Conflict* was never officially translated, but a fan-made patch is available online.

As it transpires, a relatively obscure Japanese PC game called *Silver Ghost*, released by Kure Software Koubou in 1988, exerted an influence on the design of *Shining Force*. "Prior to *Silver Ghost*," Takahashi explains, "I didn't like tactical simulation games at all – they gave players too much time to think... their tempo was all over the place. But *Silver Ghost* was different: it was a simulation action type of game where you had to direct, oversee and command multiple characters; it was the title that convinced me simulation games didn't have to be crap."

***Shining Force*'s most obvious inheritance from *Silver Ghost* is the 'gochakyara' (multiple character) system, whereby the chess-like command of units drove the series' battle system and satisfied Takahashi's desire for a truly engaging brand of tactical combat.** Daring to mention Intelligent Systems' (ostensibly) similarly structured *Fire Emblem* series only earns us a humorous retort: "The original Famicom *Fire Emblem* game? The tempo of that title was so bad that it wasn't something I even wanted to play. *Fire Emblem* had zero influence on *Shining Force*." Takahashi continues, "Rather, before participating in the *Shining* project I was thinking, 'I wonder if there's any way we can take the battles from *Dragon Quest* and make them more fun?'

» [Mega Drive] *Shining Force*'s first battle can certainly be challenging if you foolishly rush in.

Shining Force's battle system came about as a result of following that line of thinking to its logical conclusion" – evidently with a little help from *Silver Ghost*.

Even with *Shining In The Darkness* completed, development of *Shining Force* was ambitious and consequently proved extremely difficult for Takahashi's team to perfect. "From the battle system through to the combat screen, we entered development with the aim of making everything new, featuring only things that had never been seen in a game before. *Shining In The Darkness* was more successful than I had anticipated – in terms of sales and reviews – so I think I might have been overestimating my ability as a creator somewhat... in fact, it was terribly difficult to produce *Shining Force*. For the battle screen and title screen, we took inspiration from a certain other game, but what I didn't realise until after we'd finished development was that that game had used half of its four megs of ROM on those two features alone. Of course, we didn't copy the exact screen designs, but still... we created such memory-intensive battle screens that it was incredibly hard to pull it off. But hey, I remember feeling young and powerful back then.

"My basic stance as far as RPG development is concerned, is to produce worthwhile and enjoyable battles. *Shining Force* was the first embodiment of that philosophy. I felt that the primitive battles in games such as *Wizardry* and *Dragon Quest* were enjoyable, but we introduced the notion of 'distance and range' to

> **I DIDN'T LIKE TACTICAL SIMULATION GAMES. THEY GAVE PLAYERS TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK**
> HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI

A SHOW OF FORCE

MEET THE TEAM YOU'LL FIRST ENTER BATTLES WITH

Max

CLASS: Swordsman
RACE: Human

■ The protagonist of *Shining Force* is your typical self-sacrificing hero who is kind of heart but occasionally a little brash. His strong sword arm, good defence and decent number of hit points make him a solid capable leader of your team. He's a lot more talkative in the GBA remake *Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon*.

Tao

CLASS: Mage
RACE: Elf

■ A self-taught magic user, Tao starts off as the only female member of your initial fighting force. This elf mage is a surprisingly tough one, with good HP and the ability to deal out hefty physical damage when she is low on magic points. More of her backstory is revealed in *Shining Force: Resurrection of The Dark Dragon*.

Lowe

CLASS: Priest
RACE: Hobbit

■ Every good party needs a priest to heal them up and cast defensive spells, and Lowe fills this role admirably. He is great friends with Max, endlessly cheerful and loves to eat – a trait he shares with Tolkien's hobbits. While he's at his best in a healing capacity, Lowe can dole out damage when his precious MP run low.

Hans

CLASS: Archer
RACE: Elf

■ This elf archer is no fan of direct violence, which probably explains why he took up a longbow. Despite his aversion to close combat, he will fight and, as you'd expect from an archer, Hans is particularly useful against flying foes and can make short work of them with his arrows. He's an otherwise fairly basic party member.

Ken

CLASS: Knight
RACE: Centaur

■ Being a centaur, Ken is at a far better advantage than other videogame knights as his horse is already attached to him. Whilst he's a younger member of the Royal Knights, he remains a competent and loyal fighter. He lacks spells, but his four legs means he's far better at traversing the battlefield compared to his friends.

Lug

RACE: Dwarf
CLASS: Warrior

■ He may look young, but Lug is already an experienced veteran of combat when he joins Max and the rest of the team. This dwarf fighter is as tough as granite and can withstand (and deal out) large amounts of punishment. Interestingly, his name was mistranslated in the west, where you'll know him as Luke.

form *Shining Force*'s tactical battles. However, in order to produce and hone that battle system we had to go through an incredibly difficult period of experimentation with trial-and-error procedures... We overcame so many obstacles to develop that battle system, but it was a labour of love and we ended up deeply attached to it."

» [Saturn] The 3D presentation of *Shining Force III* allowed the story scenes to play out with dynamic camera angles that dramatically followed the action.

Unfortunately for Takahashi, while players and critics universally appreciated his team's fine work on *Shining Force*, Sega's bosses were less enthusiastic. In part this was a result of differences in attitude and approach between the Sega managers Takahashi had initially dealt with and those who succeeded them – new additions to the administration one by one transforming the company from a modest game-loving outfit to an austere profit-obsessed corporation. "From 1990 on," Takahashi explains, "Sega gradually became a larger scale business. New managers were recruited and things started to change. When Sega's managers were replaced, we came to be seen just as a small, unruly subsidiary that wanted things its own way, and because of that we were forced out of Sega's main line of business. From that point on, I felt that Sega had ceased to be a true software-orientated company."

This sad state of affairs forced Takahashi to begin production of *Shining Force II* with a team that had been decimated and, effectively, rebuilt. Most of the original *Shining Force* staff were beginners who had potential but no prior experience. However, even though they now had a successful game in its back catalogue, Sega's reluctance to increase the level of funding it granted for the development of this sequel meant that from an economic perspective there was little motivation to stick with the project.

"We were in a really precarious situation at that point," Takahashi admits, "because we knew that if we couldn't produce another hit we would have no future. The number of staff we had working on the *Shining Force* series varied with each game until the Saturn era, during which time the team was pretty settled and didn't change much. We carefully chose our

» The *Shining Force III* Premium Disc is a great place to find lots of concept art like this.

» [Game Gear] Even on the Game Gear, Camelot was able to create some huge bosses to fight.

» [Saturn] *Shining Force III* took the series into 3D and was one of the best-looking RPGs on Sega's 32-bit console.

staff from among many candidates, and after *Shining Force II* the core staff remained and grew stronger together. *Shining Force II* was an experimental title where we improved the story and enhanced the game's 'RPG-ness'."

Between 1992 and 1995, Takahashi also found time to oversee Camelot's production of the *Shining Force Gaiden* series of Game Gear-based spin-offs. "We developed the *Gaiden* series as a simpler variation of *Shining Force* – one that could easily be played on a portable console. At the time, I believe that a lot of games for handhelds were developed without much thought. But we wanted to produce a portable title that would be a genuine system seller, something that was more than just a 'not bad for a handheld game' type of affair." They succeeded in doing just that, and although the first *Gaiden* outing was initially restricted to a local Japanese release (a Sega publishing issue that would again hinder Camelot when it was time for the world to experience *Shining Force III*), it did eventually receive a translation as part of 1995's Mega CD compilation *Shining Force CD*.

While Takahashi's aims at the outset of the *Shining Force* series' development had been battle-orientated ambitions, the post-*Shining Force II* hardware migration from Mega Drive to Saturn – along with the maturing of Sega's core audience – meant that change was now essential. Specifically, Takahashi was aware of the need to give more attention to Camelot's storytelling, which had always been composed as an overarching, catch-all conceptualisation that included both the main *Shining Force* series and its different-name/same-bloodline close relatives. In the mid-Nineties there was a distinct shift in style: the early-period narrative can be traced right up to Camelot's 1995 Saturn debut, *Shining Wisdom*, but the following year's *Shining The Holy Ark* brought with it a revamped, more complex tone.

DREAMCAST UNBELIEVERS

TIME FOR CAMELOT TO LEAVE SEGA BEHIND

■ "We were in attendance as guests when Sega announced the Dreamcast," Takahashi confides. "On stage there were Sega managers alongside representatives of four major software houses who were pledging to support Sega's Dreamcast market... everyone was grinning." Here the story takes a predictably blue tone: "Camelot had at that point been rejected; we were apparently no longer needed in Sega's marketplace. Even though people recognised that we had made the greatest contribution to the growth of Sega's consumer market, I felt on that day as though the time had come for us to leave. I felt lonely, but at the same time I felt relieved because I sensed that there was no future for Dreamcast. Sega had become even less of a software-orientated company. Even if Camelot had made the best software for Sega, recovery of its market share still would have been impossible..."

» [Mega Drive] Churches are useful as they allow you to save your game, heal and even raise the dead.

» [Saturn] Spanning three separately released discs, *Shining Force III* is a true 32-bit epic.

» [Mega Drive] When attacking, the perspective changes to this dramatic angle, making for one of the series' most iconic features.

"Until *Wisdom*, the idea had been simply to develop a story that would attract a broad range of users," says Takahashi "From *Holy Ark* on, the story and game world were redesigned to focus on the Saturn players of the time. Japanese Saturn owners were generally in their late teens or early twenties. The age group had shifted away from children, so with these Saturn owners as the focus, we constructed a world where the concept was 'fantasy that can be enjoyed by adults'. This new approach led to a darker, deeper world than we had been creating for the 'all ages' category prior to *Holy Ark*. We started to work on the plot of a story that would be appropriate in such a world.

Things moved up another notch once Camelot turned its attention to the epic, triple scenario of *Shining Force III*. "We wanted *Shining Force III* to serve as proof to those users that we could do other types of story," Takahashi remembers. "But on the other hand, we didn't want to reject those fans who had never complained about the good-against-evil storylines. In that sense, in order to appease both sets of fans, *Shining Force III* ended up as a compilation of the results of lots of trial and error." The resulting game still told a story of good versus evil but radically allowed you to play from the perspective of 'evil' on its second disc, revealing that the definitions between the two weren't so clear cut.

Relative to team size and resources, Camelot's efforts with the *Shining* series had always been a little bit on the ambitious side, but the three-disc creation of *Shining Force III* was the team's boldest experiment and remains the high point of a series that has very few lows. The game's development was anything but simple: "We put everything we had into *Shining Force III* – it took so much time and so much of our money that no matter how many copies we sold, we would never have been able to make much money out it. I'm both a game creator and a business manager, and from the business perspective you could say that *Shining Force III* was a ridiculous challenge. It's a miracle that the game was fully realised."

> **SHINING FORCE III SERVED AS PROOF WE COULD DO OTHER TYPES OF STORY**
> HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI

The passing of time means that Hiroyuki Takahashi is now willing to speak frankly about his disappointments, even if he has no regrets. In the case of *Shining Force III*, that spells rejection, demotion and imposed limitations. "I can tell you this now: at the time of *Shining Force III*, Sega's management was, I believe, in a state of complete chaos," reveals Takahashi. "It's probably hard for you to fathom, but what was once a major part of Sega's market – namely the *Shining* series – was ejected from Sega's 'main line' of games, and the money we received from Sega to produce *Shining Force III* was less than half what they would spend on the development of 'main' games."

The ultimate fallout from this situation meant that English speakers were only treated to the first of *Shining Force III*'s three parts. "Release abroad was terribly limited," Takahashi reflects, "but that was just a consequence of it being treated so poorly by Sega in Japan. And it wasn't just *Shining Force III* that was mistreated. For example, at one point Sega was refusing to even release *Shining The Holy Ark*. We had hoped that all three *Shining Force III* scenarios would be released internationally, but our hopes weren't fulfilled. Regardless, we made *Shining Force III* in order to give something back to the fans who had supported the series up to that point. Of course it's a shame that the game wasn't a big hit, but even though it's been more than ten years since the release of *Shining Force III*, people still love the game. And because of that, it's a game that has made me genuinely happy."

And will the west ever get to experience that same happiness? It would have been remiss of us not to ask about the prospect of a *Shining Force III* remake or re-release, but Takahashi's response isn't one we wanted to hear: "Even though we produced all of the plans, graphics, did all of the programming, and produced all of the music for the *Shining* series, Sega maintains the rights. That's why we can have no say in the matter." A wry smile speaks volumes. ★

Peripheral Vision

Wide-Boy 64 AGB

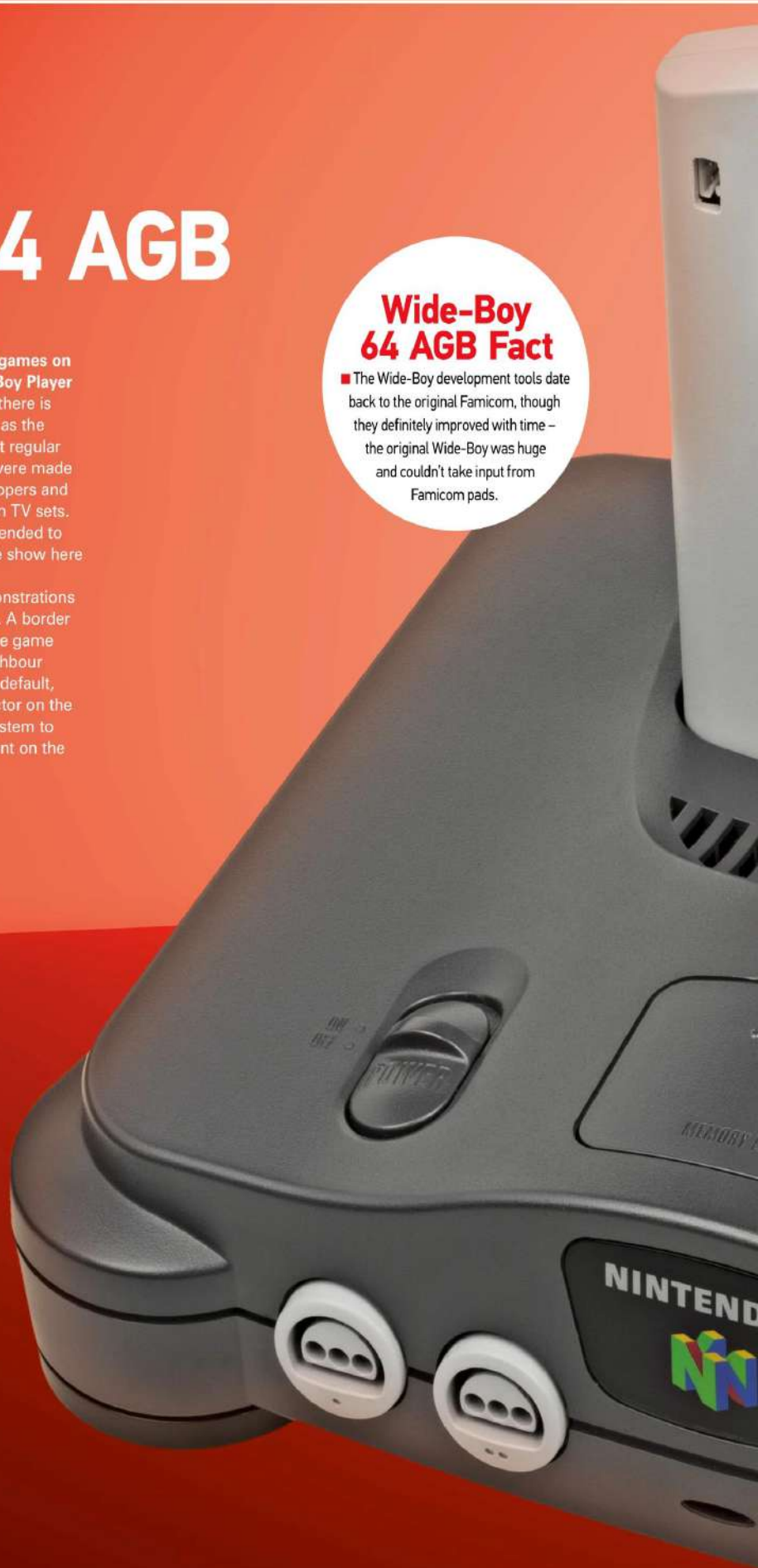
» **PLATFORM:** Nintendo 64 » **RELEASED:** 2001
» **COST:** $1,400 (LAUNCH), £3,200+ (TODAY)

If you're the sort of player who likes playing handheld games on a full-size TV screen, the Super Game Boy and Game Boy Player are probably prized parts of your collection. However, there is a way to play Game Boy games through your N64 – but as the rough construction here might suggest, it wasn't aimed at regular customers. Intelligent Systems' Wide-Boy 64 cartridges were made exclusively for sale to business customers, such as developers and the press, so that games could be tested and displayed on TV sets. The Wide-Boy 64 CGB was the first model introduced, intended to replicate a Game Boy Color, but the Wide-Boy 64 AGB we show here is capable of playing Game Boy Advance games.

Because the system was designed to be used for demonstrations and screenshots, the on-screen presentation is quite nice. A border designed to match the system's appearance surrounds the game display, but it's possible to perform a simple nearest neighbour zoom with the analogue stick. Anti-aliasing is enabled by default, but can be toggled off with the Z button. A 40-pin connector on the front of the cartridge allows a development Game Boy system to be connected, and an extension port for link play is present on the side of the cartridge. ✱

Wide-Boy 64 AGB Fact

■ The Wide-Boy development tools date back to the original Famicom, though they definitely improved with time – the original Wide-Boy was huge and couldn't take input from Famicom pads.



ESSENTIAL GAME

SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS 3

Given the Wide-Boy 64 AGB's status as an expensive novelty, it only makes sense that the game you choose to play on it should be a novelty pick, too. With that in mind, we'd suggest one of Mario's most memorable adventures. After all, what could be more novel than using an N64 to play a Game Boy Advance port of the SNES remake of a NES classic? If you're going to spend thousands of pounds on a highly prized bit of non-retail hardware, you might as well use it to cram an entire Nintendo history lesson into a single gaming session.

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

EVERCADE
FORGOTTEN GEMS

After reviewing Blaze's new handheld last month, we found one of its greatest strengths was the sheer amount of interesting titles available for it. Here we highlight the games and cartridge packs that are worth adding to your collection

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

ALIEN BRIGADE

OPERATION CLONE

ATARI COLLECTION 1, ATARI 7800, 1990

This entertaining *Operation Wolf* clone flew right under our radar, so it's been fun discovering it on the Evercade. It slavishly follows the template of Taito's arcade classic, but spices things up with the addition of aliens, as well as briefings that start each stage. Be sure to shoot the radio in the top-left corner to listen to them, though, as you'll otherwise miss important info that may stop you from completing missions. The original cart release had the option to play with a lightgun, but it works perfectly well with the Evercade's d-pad.

NINJA GOLF

PUTTS AND PUNCHES

ATARI COLLECTION 1, ATARI 7800, 1990

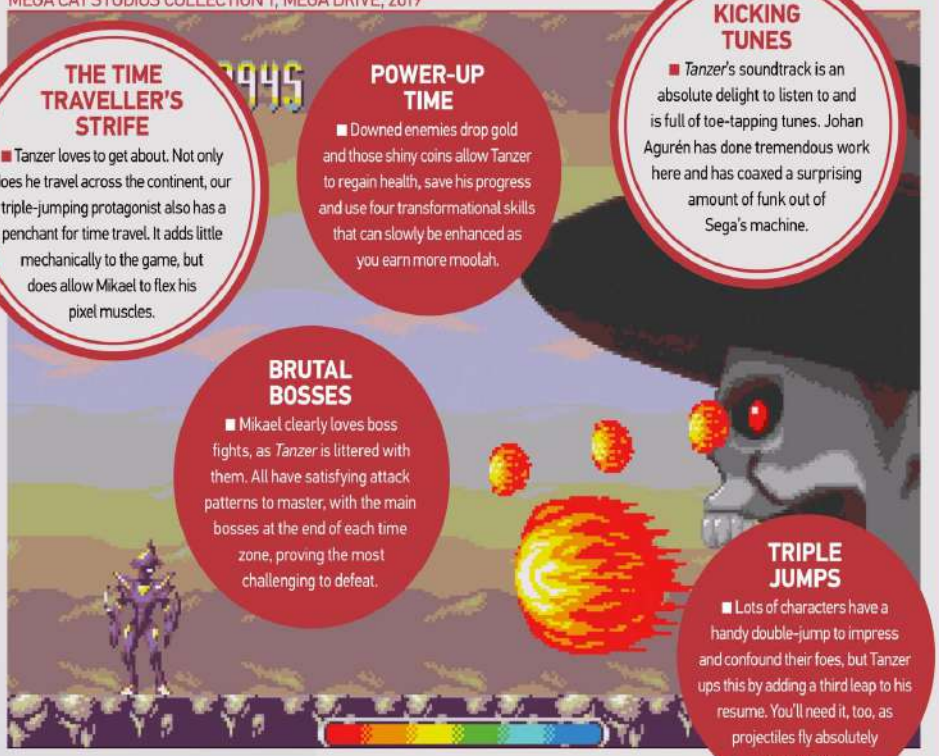
Here's another Atari 7800 gem that completely eluded us on release. This bonkers mash-up has you traversing a fairway in as few strokes as possible, while dispatching the ninjas and dangerous animals that stand between you and your ball. Reaching the hole's end offers little sanctuary, as you'll encounter a menacing dragon that flings fireballs at you while you pepper him with throwing stars. While your ninja only has a basic number of attacks to draw on, the game's slick pace and the scrappiness of the battles will help keep you on your toes.

TANZER

STRIDER THROUGH TIME

Why Mikael Tillander's Strider clone tops the Mega Cat collection

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE, 2019



THE TIME TRAVELLER'S STRIFE

■ Tanzer loves to get about. Not only does he travel across the continent, our triple-jumping protagonist also has a penchant for time travel. It adds little mechanically to the game, but does allow Mikael to flex his pixel muscles.

POWER-UP TIME

■ Downed enemies drop gold and those shiny coins allow Tanzer to regain health, save his progress and use four transformational skills that can slowly be enhanced as you earn more moolah.

KICKING TUNES

■ *Tanzer*'s soundtrack is an absolute delight to listen to and is full of toe-tapping tunes. Johan Agurén has done tremendous work here and has coaxed a surprising amount of funk out of Sega's machine.

BRUTAL BOSSES

■ Mikael clearly loves boss fights, as *Tanzer* is littered with them. All have satisfying attack patterns to master, with the main bosses at the end of each time zone, proving the most challenging to defeat.

TRIPLE JUMPS

■ Lots of characters have a handy double-jump to impress and confound their foes, but Tanzer ups this by adding a third leap to his resume. You'll need it, too, as projectiles fly absolutely everywhere.

MEGA CAT STUDIOS

This developer/publisher's cart is brimming with indie brilliance

OLD TOWERS

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE, 2019

■ Mega Cat's cart is home to numerous fun puzzlers, but this remains our favourite. It's a slick offering by Denis Grachev that has you dashing around deviously designed levels as you attempt to clear it of coins, whilst avoiding traps and racing to the exit. Later stages are further complicated by the addition of a second controllable character.

JUSTICE DUEL

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, NES, 2019

■ This *Joust* clone is an odd inclusion as it really comes to life as a four-player game and Blaze's handheld doesn't offer multiplayer play. Luckily, single-player remains plenty of fun and sees you playing as a cybernetically enhanced American patriot who has to fight off increasingly frantic waves of enemies whilst riding an engineered eagle.

CREEPY BRAWLERS

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, NES, 2017

■ This diverting *Punch Out!!* clone pits you against iconic movie monsters rather than comical pugilists, but the results are the same as you fight your way to greatness. Just be mindful that the controls are currently reversed, so you might want to use the new firmware update that's been released.

SUPER PAINTER

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, NES, 2018

■ Retro Souls' colourful platformer has been eating up a lot of our spare time recently. It charges you with colouring grey blocks by running over them; once every block is highlighted you can head to the level's exit and tackle the next stage. Watch out though, as cute monsters ensure your painting mission becomes extremely perilous.

LITTLE MEDUSA

MEGA CAT STUDIOS COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE, 2018

■ Mega Cat's Mega Drive puzzler is essentially a spiritual predecessor to Irem's *Kickle Cubicle*, but dresses up the block-pushing with a distinctively charming Olympian theme. Retrieving the stars, which are scattered about each stage, will require a fair amount of head-scratching, while the boss encounters are challenging but never unfair.

BUDGET SAVERS

One advantage of the Evercade is that it offers officially licensed games that are often far cheaper than their original counterparts

JOE AND MAC 2: LOST IN THE TROPICS

DATA EAST COLLECTION 1, SNES, 1994

■ Known in PAL land as *Joe And Mac 3*, this prehistoric platformer regularly sells for £130+ complete, meaning this is a far more effective way to own this excellent sequel. It takes all the fun elements of the original, but considerably ramps everything up, with bigger dinosaurs, better setpieces and greatly improved visuals.

INCANTATION

INTERPLAY COLLECTION 1, SNES, 1996

■ This woeful platformer from Titus was released late in the Super Nintendo's life and as a result sells for close to £700. It's not worth that, of course, but *Incantation* becomes a far more interesting proposition on a £15 cartridge with five other games, even if it's squarely aimed at younger gamers.

SPLATTERHOUSE 3

NAMCO MUSEUM COLLECTION 2, MEGA DRIVE, 1993

■ Shockingly, this excellent brawler from Namco never received a PAL release, so the Evercade is the perfect way to discover it and avoid the £130+ price it now sells for. It's a great game, too, enormously improving on the earlier games by adding nonlinear exploration, a monstrous transformation for our hero Rick and brooding cutscenes.

METAL MARINES

NAMCO MUSEUM COLLECTION 1, SNES, 1993

■ Namco's RTS game starts from £80 if you want a complete copy, so this version is a cheap alternative. The game itself is superb, offering plenty of freedom as you go about safeguarding your base from continual enemy attacks. Just be mindful of the steep learning curve due to the lack of in-game instructions.

SUBMARINE COMMANDER

ATARI COLLECTION 2, ATARI 2600, 1982

■ We've seen complete versions of this sell between £50 and £230, which is a little rich for our blood. Despite its sim-like name, this is essentially *Battlezone* in the water. You follow the radar, locate ships and sink them before your time runs out. It's shallow, but a surprising time-waster.

CRASH N' THE BOYS: STREET CHALLENGE

BLOOD SPORTS

TECHNOS COLLECTION 1, NES, 1992

This oddly entertaining sports title has been one of the highlights of the Technos collection for us. Devised as part of the *Kunio-kun* series, this weirdly violent sports game would have passed many by first time around due to its late NES release. Originally designed for up to four players, the aim is to pick members of your team (who all have their own strengths and weaknesses) to take part in five events that include 400-metre hurdles, swimming, hammer throwing, rooftop jumping and one-on-one brawling. Of course, being a *Kunio* game, there's a typically brutal spin to the action that ranges from trying to distract your opponent in the hurdles, to actively drowning them underwater during the swimming event. We can't imagine that flying at the next Olympics.

MAPPY KIDS

FAR FROM CHEESY

NAMCO COLLECTION 1, FAMICOM, 1989

It's possible Namco had a lot of input with its two Evercade collections, as the level of slickness is a step up over the other releases. Take *Mappy Kids*, for example. Here's a Famicom release that's been localised and released for the first time outside of Japan on Evercade and it's a delightful little discovery. Unlike *Mappy*, it's a far more conventional platformer with Mappy's son leaping through oversized levels, running across washing lines and leaping up trees. He can bash enemies and crack open boxes and bricks, which often hide goodies. The little scamp also has a delightful helicopter tail move for traversing bigger distances and hazards. Add in some fun little minigames and charming visuals and *Mappy Kids* highlights the Evercade's potential at offering players a new experience.

DESERT FALCON

ZAXX-ON, ZAXX-OFF

ATARI COLLECTION 2, ATARI 7800, 1987

Interestingly, *Desert Falcon* is one of a handful of Evercade games that are available in both Atari 2600 and Atari 7800 forms. Regardless of which one you plump for, you'll discover it to be a fun *Zaxxon*-like isometric shooter with a stylish Egyptian theme as your raptor flies across the desert landscape avoiding enemies or shooting them down with bolts of lightning. Like *Zaxxon*, you can change your altitude, but here you'll need to drop to the ground in order to pick up gold and hieroglyphics. These ancient carvings are useful because collecting three in a row creates a power-up, and you'll receive different ones based on what you scavenge. While we spent more time with the 7800 version, the 2600 offering is also strangely distracting.

THE FUTURE OF EVERCADE

Evercade's product director Andy Byatt has big plans for the handheld

How do you secure licences?
I deal with most of the licensing arrangements which is equal parts exciting and frustrating. Usually, we approach IP owners to show them the product and get them interested. They will either supply us a list of games they own, or we give them a wishlist of games we think they own. Sometimes licensors say they do not own games which nobody else claims rights to, so they get lost in time. We then get an agreed game list to an agreed number of titles and sign the deal.

Does a company, like Interplay, choose the games or do you?
Interplay had an initial list of about 18 games, but some were tied up in red tape and some were not as interesting as the ones chosen. We spent time playing them and then made a proposal.

How does it feel seeing owners discover new games?
We love it. We had the same experience when we started out acquiring the licences for these collections. Someone in the office would turn to me and say something like, 'You know what, *Claymates* is an awesome little game, I really like it.' It is a joy, to be honest.

Why obtain obscure games like *Mappy Kids*?
We asked for *Mappy Kids* because it was a game that would be interesting. It was a nice one because many people know *Mappy*, but will discover this through our console. We think our core audience wants these kind of games alongside bigger names, and we intend to continue delivering this.

Would you consider localising more Japanese-exclusive games for Evercade?
We have one being worked on now. It is not an easy process due to character sizes and space, but we would love to do more for the future.

Will more handheld games appear on Evercade?
We have lots of plans to get more formats on the system. Handhelds are a natural fit for sure, but we do not want to limit it too much.

Do current retro prices influence your decisions when acquiring new titles?
We had an eye on rarity when talking to licensors so this did figure at some level, but its not really a driver as such. We are looking for games that give us something different or inspire nostalgia.

We've enjoyed seeing systems like the Atari 7800 and Lynx on the Evercade. Can we expect similar for other less popular consoles?
The 7800 games are great because 2600 classics have been seen quite a lot in various guises, whereas [the] 7800 does not get as much love. I'm a massive fan of the Lynx and had one growing up, so it was a real joy to get Lynx games onto the system. We would love to get all sorts on there.

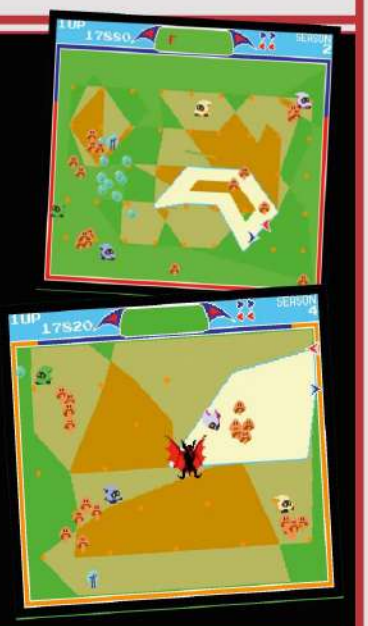
How will you continue Evercade's momentum?
We will continue to add games like *Xeno Crisis*, *Tanglewood* and the Oliver twins collections, building up 50-plus cartridges in the next few years [as well as] engagement with our community and striving to build a better product. We are working hard on improving the experience every day and with such a vibrant community, we want to deliver the best possible product. There is a lot more to come and we are enjoying the ride.

LIBBLE RABBLE

MONEY FOR OLD ROPE

NAMCO COLLECTION 1, SUPER FAMICOM, 1994

This oddball curiosity from *Pac-Man*'s creator Toru Iwatani never received a western release, so its inclusion on the Evercade is highly welcome. While it shares elements with Taito's arcade hit *Qix*, *Libble Rabble* is very much its own thing and has you controlling two arrows (Libble and Rabble) who are connected together by a rope and controlled by the d-pad and face buttons. Pegs are dotted around the stage and you must wrap your rope around them to herd up the Mushlins found on each level. Connect the lines and anything inside will be caught, including any enemies that get trapped along with the cute critters you're collecting. While the controls do take a while to click, the game works well and you'll soon by rounding up Mushlins with ease. Interestingly, *Libble Rabble*'s button controls aren't reversed like some games we've played and the button updates don't affect this.



PIKO POWER

Here are our picks from the 20 games available on Piko's Evercade cartridge

WATER MARGIN

PIKO COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE, 1996

■ Based on the acclaimed Chinese novel, this Mega Drive gem was translated into English by Piko in 2015. It's a rousing scrolling fighter that shares elements with Capcom CPS titles like *Knights Of The Round* – such as the option to smash money and food into smaller pieces for more points.

SWITCHBLADE

PIKO COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE,2019

■ After creating a Jaguar port of Simon Phipps' popular platformer, Piko converted it to the Mega Drive. The end result is a faithful representation of the original Atari ST game, as you clamber around the mazelike levels in your quest to defeat Havoc. There's a wonderful soundtrack by the late Ben Daglish, too.

IRON COMMANDO

PIKO COLLECTION 1, SNES, 1995

■ Arcade Zone's explosive scrolling fighter never received a western release until Piko localised it in 2016 (a Japanese reissue followed in 2017). *Iron Commando*'s strengths are its extensive weapon selection (from knives to shotguns), huge sprites and the ability to traverse certain levels on various vehicles, including a mine cart and motorcycle.

BRAVE BATTLE SAGA

PIKO COLLECTION 1, MEGA DRIVE, 1996

■ Here is another Chinese game that's been snapped up by Piko and localised for western gamers. While the combat feels a little unbalanced at times (magical attacks feel far too powerful) and the story is rather generic, we've still enjoyed *Brave Battle Saga* as it has some fantastic monster designs and brilliant summon attacks.

DRAGON VIEW

PIKO COLLECTION 1, SNES, 1994

■ This rather unique RPG takes the 3D open world exploring of its predecessor *Drakkhen*, but marries it to a rather robust combat engine that makes it feel like a Capcom brawler. Another nice touch is how the story is narrated, which gives *Dragon View* a very unique feel compared to other RPGs of the time.

» [GBA] Bonus rounds in *Uridium Advance* have you bombing a reactor while fending off alien ships.

URIDIUM ADVANCE

Jester Interactive had big plans for Graftgold's back catalogue, but ultimately only one of its proposed updates was completed. John McMurray looks back at his unreleased GBA follow-up Uridium Advance

Words by Rory Milne

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** JESTER INTERACTIVE

» **DEVELOPER:** TIN TIGER

» **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 2002

At the turn of the century, Steve Cain, Scott Johnson and coder John McMurray left Liverpool's Rage Software to form Tin Tiger, and as John tells us, the firm's first big project was a Game Boy Advance update of *Uridium* for Jester Interactive. "Through our various connections in the industry we got this offer," John says of the deal, "so I sat down with a C64 emulator and played *Uridium*. I soon realised that it was a very difficult game, and that it needed some of the edges taken off it."

Based on his research, John decided that his GBA follow-up should revolve around speed and weapon upgrades rather than deadly obstacles. "My main aim was to create a game that really encouraged you to go fast," John enthuses. "You still hit things, but when you were chasing after power-ups you really went for it."

Of course, John didn't want to make his update too easy, and so he configured its raised structures to repel the player's Manta ship when it collided with them. "The idea was that what used to be 'insta-death' would become obstacles to be negotiated," John reasons. "So you could be flying away from a mine and hit an object, and then you could bounce back into the mine. The physics were actually quite advanced, but in a Heath Robinson kind of way!"

In keeping with the original, John gave his enemy Dreadnoughts on-board components, although these would be targeted with bombs, not blasters. "We put bombs in because you had the extra button," John explains, "so you would be chasing things up and down the levels with a set target to blow up on the decks. There was a damage meter, and when that started flashing you could land."

A further enhancement followed in the form of a reward system, which connected dispatching opponents to bombing Dreadnought defences. "Your bomb meter would go down, but when you shot aliens it would go back up," John remembers. "That was just to introduce a little more purpose to the whole thing."

As well as tying his game's mechanics together, John also created new alien craft to complement his GBA versions of the original *Uridium*'s enemies. "I had

» [GBA] Like the C64 original, *Uridium Advance* begins with the Manta gracefully leaving its shuttle.

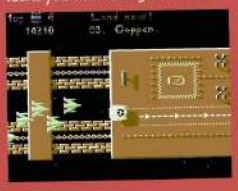
» [GBA] Backflipping in *Uridium Advance* lets you quickly dispatch opponents that are attacking from behind.

SIMILAR GAMES THAT DID GET RELEASED...

URIDIUM

1986, HEWSON CONSULTANTS

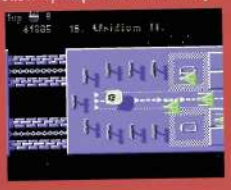
■ Andrew Braybrook's shooter tasks you with taking down vast space freighters with a one-man ship by dispatching quotas of the alien craft that defend them. *Uridium*'s homing mines and deadly raised structures make skilful piloting a necessity.



URIDIUM PLUS

1986, HEWSON CONSULTANTS

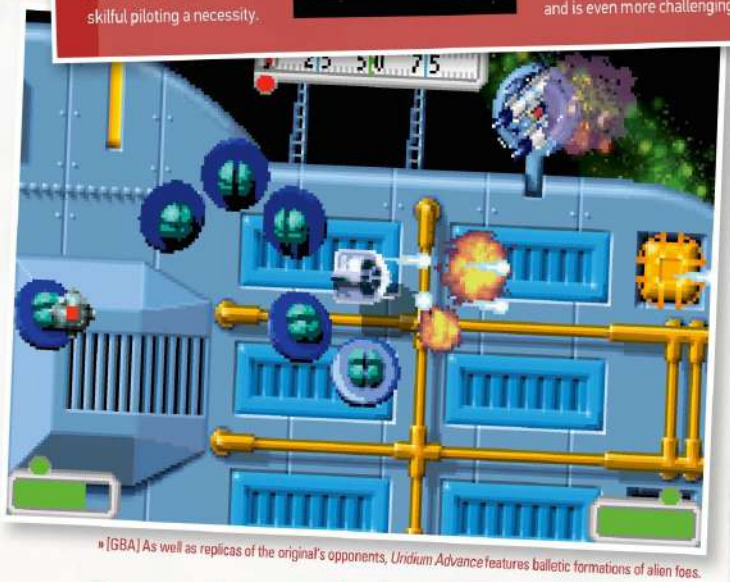
■ Far from a rehash, Andrew's follow-up dispenses with netting quotas to get landing clearance and features an entirely new set of Dreadnoughts to destroy. *Uridium Plus* is also a little faster than its predecessor and is even more challenging.



URIDIUM 2

1993, RENEGADE SOFTWARE

■ As you'd expect from a 16-bit sequel, *Uridium 2* boasts more mechanics and deeper gameplay than its 8-bit counterparts. As well as power-ups, there's a two-player co-op mode, a much improved bonus round, four-way scrolling and speech samples.



» [GBA] As well as replicas of the original's opponents, *Uridium Advance* features balletic formations of alien foes.

» [GBA] You aren't just given power-ups in *Uridium Advance*, you have to chase them down.

» [GBA] *Uridium Advance* scrolls vertically to show the tops and bottoms of its imposing Dreadnoughts.

> "Uridium Advance became more of a shooter than Uridium, which was more of a negotiation"
> John McMurray

decided that we would still have the original opponents, but I thought I'd also throw in some *Galaga*-esque waves," John recalls. "I wanted there to be more to do, and we could display a lot more sprites."

But while John added balletic foes to the original game's design, he left out one element of the C64 classic from his GBA follow-up – *Uridium Advance*. "We cut the sideways flying because it was actually quite hard to make things out on a GBA," John notes. "You didn't have that level of precision, so *Uridium* Advance became more of a shooter than *Uridium*, which was more of a negotiation."

Uridium Advance also became less confined than its predecessor, as John opted to make his Dreadnoughts wider than the GBA's screen. "It gave you that extra bit of space to manoeuvre," John observes, "and it added a little more exploration when you were looking for those last few targets to destroy."

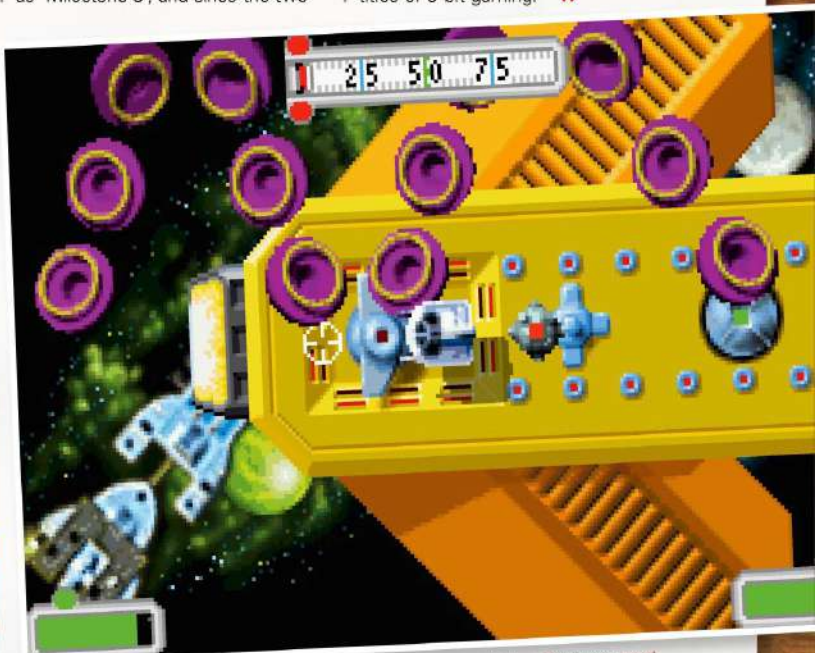
Besides developing his *Uridium* follow-up's core levels, John also reimagined the original's bonus stage as a tribute to a classic movie. "The decision to have an actual reactor was partly because I'd seen *Return Of The Jedi*," John acknowledges.

» John McMurray wanted to emphasise speed in his adaptation of *Uridium* for the Game Boy Advance.

"It was like a big ball of energy, and when you hit it there was a massive explosion."

Once completed, *Uridium Advance* received Nintendo's approval, as did John's second GBA title *Paradroid*, which was going to share a cartridge with its Graftgold counterpart. "I think on its own *Uridium Advance* was too slight to release as a full-price game," John speculates, "hence the idea of doing the two-game bundle." Jester's former creative director Tim Wright adds: "Jester went bust around that time. *Paradroid* only got as far as 'Milestone 3', and since the two games were meant to be a combined ROM the project died."

Decades after its completion, John still fondly remembers his unreleased GBA *Uridium*, and is satisfied that he created a successor that he can be proud of. "There are always going to be things that you want to change," John reflects, "but the art of finishing something is saying: 'That's enough.' So I'm proud of *Uridium Advance*. I wanted it to be a game deserving of the name *Uridium*, which in my mind was one of the most iconic titles of 8-bit gaming." ✱



» [GBA] As with its predecessors, *Uridium Advance*'s Dreadnoughts fire deadly mines that doggedly follow you around.

TONY POMFRET

He got his feet wet at Ocean and created the ultimate joystick destroyer for the C64. Tony Pomfret recalls his three decades in the British software business

Words by Paul Drury

Tony does not mince his words. Whether it's shenanigans at Ocean Software in the Eighties or how his Special FX adventure was sabotaged, he'll tell you how he sees things in broad, profanity-heavy Mancunian tones. And he has a lot to say, having worked at many big-name British developers including Software Projects, Rage, Acclaim and the aforementioned Ocean. His work stretches from the Commodore PET right through to the PS3 and Xbox 360 and he has twice graced the cover of the world's premier Commodore 64 fanzine *FREEZE64*. "People keep telling me I'm a C64 legend," Tony grins. "30 years on, I'm starting to believe it."

Some of us will remember you from the *Commercial Breaks* documentary, screened in 1984, which featured both Ocean and Imagine Software. You look about 15 years old in it. Shouldn't you have been in school?
[Laughs]. I was 18 but yeah I did look young. It was a shock when the TV crew turned up, and I seem to remember my family thought it was a big deal. I think one of them videoed it.

In the programme, you are shown working on *Hunchback II*, and in one scene, the whole team is sitting around a table, discussing the game's design. Is that actually how it worked?
That was utter bollocks. It was all staged. I did that game on my own.

Dave Ward, cofounder of Ocean, is in that scene, apparently being very hands-on with game design.
[Laughs loudly]. That is utter bullshit, too. He didn't have a clue how you actually coded a game. Not a bag of glue. You didn't see him that much, to be honest.

Now you're going to tell us the lovely scene where you take *Hunchback II* to a computer club and get school children to give you feedback is faked, too.
Yup. Our PR department, which was basically one woman, thought it'd look good to go into a school and get filmed. That never normally happened.

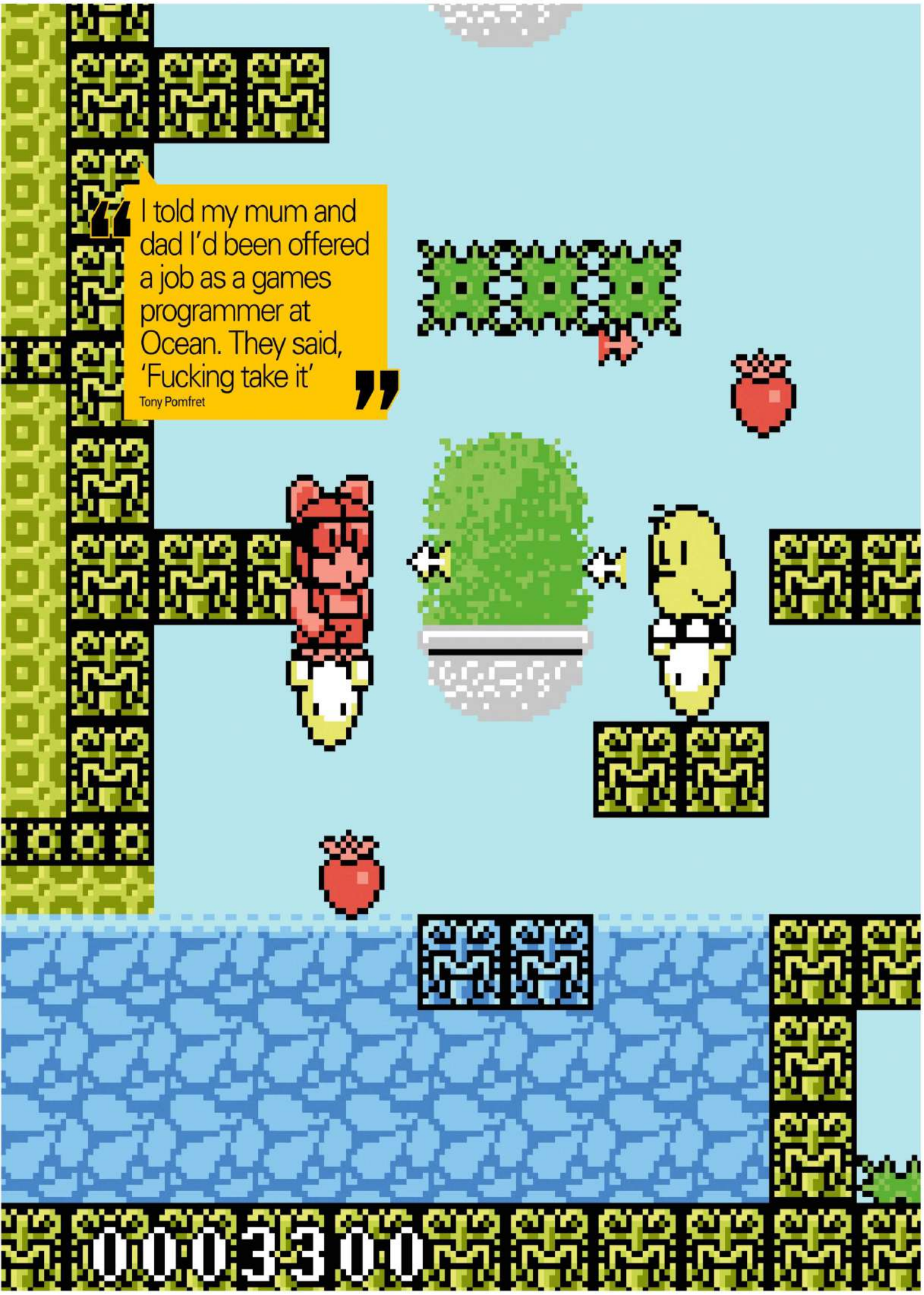
At least tell us you actually worked at Ocean.
[Laughs]. Yeah and getting the job there was surprisingly easy. The Ocean offices were up the road from my dad's computer shop, Sumlock, which he'd run since the Seventies. I'd learned to program years before on a Commodore PET that my parents had bought me, which I know must have cost over a £1,000. I know I was ever so slightly privileged there. I picked up BASIC pretty quickly and then started learning simple assembler code. I did a few games which we'd sell on cassette through the shop. Then things got pretty groovy. I was working full-time in the shop by this time and one day, a bunch of four people came in. They asked if we'd got books on programming and we started chatting. One bloke had a really similar accent to me, so I reckoned he was from Wigan.

Is that your home town?
No, I'm from near Wigan. Do not say that I am from Wigan.

Okay, sorry. Do go on...
He told me he worked at Ocean. Well, our shop was selling Ocean games like they were going out of fashion. I showed him this game I was working on called *Bushfire*, which was influenced by *Choplifter*. I don't think he was expecting what he saw. It had lots of raster interrupts, border and colour splits, visual effects... his jaw hit the floor, basically. It didn't look like he'd seen this stuff before. He asked me if I'd be in the shop tomorrow and said, 'I'm here every day, even Saturdays.' Then he told me his name – Dave Collier.

Ah, the famous Commodore 64 coder!
He came in the next day, on his own this time. I thought he must be after something special. He was – me. He offered me a job as a games programmer at Ocean but I said I'd have to ask my mum and dad because I didn't want to leave them in the lurch. When I told them, they said, 'Fucking take it.' Those were their very words.

It's good to have such supportive parents. What was it like when you arrived for your first day at Ocean?
It was a real culture shock because I had my own office and a desk with a C64 sitting on it. I


“I told my mum and dad I’d been offered a job as a games programmer at Ocean. They said, ‘Fucking take it’”
Tony Pomfret
000300

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON** [1984] C64
- **HUNCHBACK II** [1984] C64
- **RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II** [1985] C64
- **ROLAND'S RAT RACE** [1985] C64
- **MIKIE** [1986] C64
- **HYSTERIA** [1987] C64
- **FIREFLY** [1988] C64
- **PICTIONARY** [1989] NES
- **THE NEW ZEALAND STORY** [1990] NES
- **SUPER OFF-ROAD** [1991] SNES
- **POWER DRIVE** [1993] SNES
- **REVOLUTION X** [1995] PLAYSTATION
- **DARKLIGHT CONFLICT** [1997] PLAYSTATION
- **SPACE DEBRIS** [1999] PLAYSTATION
- **GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE** [2003] XBOX
- **MADEMAN** [2007] XBOX/PS2/PC
- **MOTOGP 09/10** [2010] XBOX 360/PS3

> "We'd banter in the Ocean office, like, 'What's that shit little machine you're working on? Oh, it's a Spectrum isn't it?'"
> Tony Pomfret

soon realised why I'd got snaffled, though. Dave [Collier] was the lead C64 programmer and he said, 'That screen splitting and scrolling and all the rasterisation you showed me… that's really good. Have you played *Track & Field*? Because that's what we want to make *Daley Thompson* into.' I asked if he'd done any of this before and he just said, 'No.' So we took it from there.

Your C64 version of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* gives Daley the correct skin tone whereas the Spectrum version makes him white. Is this an example of you championing the C64's better colour capabilities.
Yeah, I understood the reason the Spectrum made Daley white – the machine was shit. We did really try to make it look as much like Daley as we could, which was difficult with that number of pixels, but yeah, we wanted to get the skin colour the way it should be.

The game was obviously heavily based on *Track & Field* as you said and also Activision's *Decathlon*. Did Ocean consult any lawyers to avoid any copyright issues?
Did they fuck. It was the industry norm back then. That game was hard work because we had a ridiculously tight deadline. We had to finish it before the Summer Olympics in 1984 ended. I worked my absolute ballocks off to get it done. I remember locking myself in my room office, staring at the screen, going, 'Can I do this?' Then I said to myself it was just like writing a little game at home, like I had been doing.

***Rambo: First Blood Part 2* also borrowed heavily from an arcade title, this time**

» [C64] *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*: the bane of all joysticks…

» Tony monkeying about at an Ocean press shoot.

Capcom's *Commando* which made its debut in 1985.
We did try and get the proper licence for that one. Me and Jon Woods [cofounder of Ocean] and my girlfriend at the time went down to this swanky hotel in London to make a presentation to Capcom. Jon fancied the pants off her and thought he might have a shot but he never had a chance. Anyway, I was there to show Capcom what we could do. I was in this room with a load of Japanese executives and I showed them some stuff we'd done on the C64. An agreement to license *Commando* was made, the price was set and the deal was done. Or so we thought! When we were back in Manchester, we found out Elite had slipped in the backdoor and made them a counteroffer.

Did this leave you in the lurch?
Well, when we got the *Rambo* licence, we went to watch a preshowing [of the film], took our notepads and jotted down major events in the film. That became my script and I tried to stick to it as best I could in our game… in the time I had which was not bloody long enough, as usual.

Because it wasn't an official arcade conversion, you could develop your own spin on the game design and ultimately introduced your own ideas.
Yes, totally. *Commando* had vertical scrolling but I said why don't we do eight-way scrolling and make it big? That was pretty new on the C64 and I knew how to do sprite multiplexing so we could have a plethora of sprites on the screen. By not having the licence, I could actually make a better game.

» [PS2] *Mademan*: an offer you may refuse.

FIVE TO PLAY Some of Tony's hits

DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

■ Tony's first game for Ocean was on this infamous joystick killer, which featured arguably Britain's greatest ever Olympic athlete. It's no *Track & Field* but its huge popularity when it first released back in 1984 gives it a certain nostalgic charm.

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART 2

■ Expanding on the *Commando* formula, your musclebound hero single-handedly takes on an army, mainly using cutlery. It's impressive with eight-way scrolling and a helicopter air battle, though it's perhaps too tough for its own good.

FIREFLY

■ An ambitious title which has you blasting alien scum, sector by sector, as you aim to deactivate their power source. It looks great thanks to artist Karen Davies and has a banging Fred Gray soundtrack, but the minigames can be a tad frustrating.

POWER DRIVE

■ A self-confessed petrolhead, it is not surprising Tony has worked on several driving games during his long career and we rather like this top-down rallying title, which has you skidding across the globe in what looks like a souped-up Postman Pat van.

GLADIATOR: SWORD OF VENGEANCE

■ An odd mangling of Roman and Greek mythology, with the bluster of Russell Crowe thrown in for good measure, this is still an entertainingly bloody hack and slash through enemies real and ethereal. And did you ever get your feet red from one of the street ads?

Is that how you approached *Hunchback II* – taking the best bits of the original and adding your own ideas?
Well, I took inspiration from *Hunchback*, obviously, and there were lots of platform games around at the time but I more went back to the film, with the bell towers and the bats. That game was all written at my desk at Ocean. I was getting £10,000 a year and you'd get a bonus when you completed a game. For Roland's *Rat Race*, I got £4,000 which was huge because we did it so quickly, but usually the bonuses were quite pathetic. And it wasn't based on sales, it was based on you getting the job done.

So quality wasn't really an issue, rather it was all about getting the game finished and on the shelves?
That was about it. All us coders wanted to make something brilliant, so we would put as much groovy niceness in as we could. If we hit the deadline and got a bonus, whoopy do!

After some pretty big titles, we noticed you worked on a less well-known game, called *Helikopter Jagd*, which only seems to have been released in mainland Europe.
That was supposed to be a copy of a Spectrum game by Vortex but I thought that was rubbish, so I made my own better version, partly inspired by the *Bushfire* game I'd been working on before I joined Ocean. Spectrum games back then were pretty naff until good programmers like Joff [Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith] came along.

You're unashamedly pro Commodore 64. Was there any 'Speccy versus C64' playground rivalry at Ocean?
Massively. We were in completely different rooms and yeah, we'd talk in the pub at lunchtimes and occasionally some banter in the office, like, 'Good god, what's that shit little machine you're working on? Oh, it's a Spectrum isn't it…'

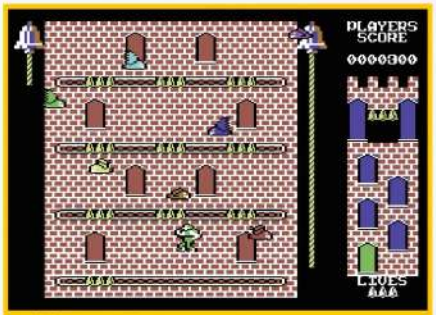
We suppose that meant you were especially impressed when someone like Joffa Smith made the Spectrum sing?
Joff just appeared at Ocean. As you can see in *Commercial Breaks*, he brought in this game called *Pud Pud*, which I played and told Dave Ward, 'Yeah, offer him something for this game and maybe offer him a job as well.' He joined Ocean and he was bubbly, a bit of a nutjob at times, and he did everything himself – all the programming, the graphics, the audio. He was an absolute little whizz, he really were. And he became my best mate.

It was so sad when he passed away back in 2010.
I went to see him in hospital a week before he passed away. That was pretty emotional for me because he was my best friend. When we departed from Ocean and set up Special FX with Paul Finnegan, I'd steal ideas off Joff, he'd steal ideas off me and we'd just bounce off each other.

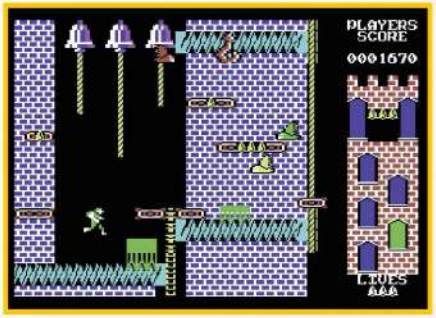
What prompted you to leave Ocean?
Easy – I got sacked. And I never knew why. I actually asked Gary Bracey [software director at Ocean] the other day on an internet forum and he didn't know why either. I was over halfway through the conversion of *Mikie* when I got the sack so I finished the game off at home over the next few weeks, making it as faithful as I could and adding in some of my own touches like the groovy high score entry. I drove to Manchester, went into Ocean and delivered it by hand to Gary saying, 'That's *Mikie* done.' He just said, 'Thanks. Bye.' That was it. No offer of money or anything.

You'd been working there for over two years. Surely they should have explained why you were getting the boot?
Honestly, I was not given a reason. Dave Collier just said, 'You've been terminated.' I was just like, 'What the fuck?' It made bugger all sense because I was deep into developing *Mikie*.

» The Special (FX) Ones: (left to right) Tony, Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith and Jim 'Baggers' Bagley.



» [C64] *Hunchback II*: don't let the bells end.



> I was developing New Zealand Story on a bastardised NES, with wires hanging out of it, and when I tried to take it on a flight, they thought it was a bomb
>
> Tony Pomfret

» Tony in a scene from the *Commercial Breaks* documentary.

» Tony (centre, wearing tie) in another scene from *Commercial Breaks* discussing game design.

Do you regret taking the time to finish *Mikie* off in retrospect?
[Pauses]. It was like having a kid. I just wanted to make the game as good as I could. I couldn't leave it unfinished.

Fortunately, you soon got a call from former Ocean colleague, Paul Finnegan.
Paul was brilliant. Sweetest bloke in the world. He'd been one of the partners at Ocean but he'd been treated like shit, too. He introduced me to Karen Davies, who would be the graphic artist, which was great because I was shit at art. We set up in a spare bedroom at his house in Liverpool and one day Paul walked in and said, 'I've got a mate of yours here,' and it was Joff. I thought he was just coming for a look round but no, he was joining us as the Spectrum coder. It was absolutely brill. We eventually moved into an office in Liverpool. Coding, getting pissed in the afternoon... it was a right laugh.

Your first game for Special FX was *Hysteria* and reader Rory Milne wants to know how you felt when magazines raved about how amazing the game was before moaning that it should have had more than three levels?
[Laughs]. That did piss me off a bit but we had to get it finished quickly. We were a new company... and Paul basically got butchered by Ocean. They let him leave to set up Special FX but anything we did, they had first dibs on it. It was a legal agreement and it was essentially like we were working for Ocean again, which I didn't fucking want because they'd shit on my bed, big time. We were under the cosh, so got it done quick... and then Ocean strung us along for a few months before saying, 'Nah, we don't want it anymore.'

Do you think that was deliberate sabotage?
Oh yeah. We shopped *Hysteria* around a few places. Software Projects was also in Liverpool, in this shithole of an industrial place, and they published it – at a stupidly low cost.

Your next project was the ambitious *Firefly*, a multidirectional scrolling game with a huge play area. Did you plan out all the sectors on paper first?
Did I fuck. It was all in me head. I'd chatted about it with Joff and we had this idea of a big space game with eight-way scrolling and wanted to get little bonus games in it as well. I remember Paul thought it was a bit too difficult, so I sat down in front of him and played it through without losing a life. Joff said, 'See, told you it wasn't too hard!'

***Firefly* was to be the last game you worked on at Special FX. What happened there?**
Ocean happened. We'd moved to Albert Dock by then, with some financial support from Ocean, and because they had first option on everything we did, they essentially took us over. We were under the power of the Ocean gods. Joff and I didn't like Ocean. They'd shat on him as well.

Which is why you moved to Software Creations, we imagine?
God, yeah. They were a bunch of Mancs in a grubby office, with lots of arcade conversions coming in, and it was a good giggle. I got to work on the NES which was great. It had an awful lot of sprites. Okay, they were only 8x8 and they flickered like a bastard if you got too many on the same line but it had loads of colours and didn't need two pixels for multicolour mode. Plus it [had a] 6502 processor and I was used to that from the C64.

Was producing games for Nintendo restrictive at all?
I do remember in *Pictionary*, we had to have a dictionary of dirty words, which Nintendo actually came up with, to stop players using them. We were pretty impressed with how many they came up with. They asked us to add more, though. We told them that wouldn't be a problem.

It's almost your specialist subject, Tony. You also handled the fine conversion of *New Zealand Story* for the NES.
I wrote most of it in England but then got rushed out to Taito in Seattle to finish it off. I was developing it on a bastardised NES, with wires hanging out of it, and when I got to the airport, they thought it was a bomb. I said it was, 'British technology I'm showing to the Americans,' and I got away with it.

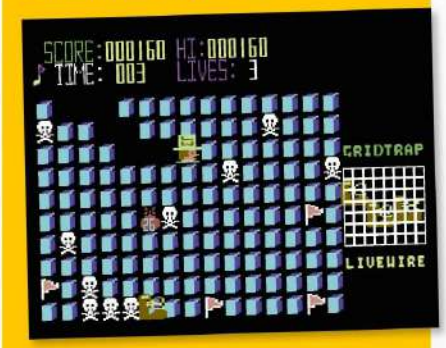
Were you friends with the Pickford brothers who also worked at Software Creations?
Yeah, until I got sacked. I wrote on the Software Creations signing in board, 'Pickford Productions', because they seemed to be taking over everything in the place, which I didn't think was right. It was meant to be a joke but I got the sack for doing it.

So you were back looking about for a coding gig, then?
I'd been back home from Seattle – which I hadn't particularly enjoyed as it was wetter than Manchester – for about a week and I was coming back from the pub one night when I got hit on a pelican crossing by a police car doing 70mph with no lights and no sirens. I was thrown 20 feet into the air, broke every bone in my bloody body and was lucky to survive. I was messed up and in hospital for a long time.

That sounds terrible. When you did recover, you joined Rage and worked on *Power Drive* for the SNES...
It was great going to Rage because I was back with me old mates like Joff and Paul Finnegan and the SNES was way better hardware. Paul said, 'Do

ALL IN THE FAMILY

As well as running the Manchester-based computer shop Sumlock Microware, Tony's dad, Mike Pomfret, also ran LiveWire Software, which published almost 20 games in the Eighties. Mainly focusing on Commodore machines, it released such titles as *Gridtrap* and *Triad* for the C64 and *Frogger*-clone *Jumpin' Jack* for the VIC-20, which actually forced Imagine Software to rename its similarly titled Spectrum release to *Leggit*. The company continued until 1987, supporting the C16/Plus 4 and MSX with games such as *Heebie Jeebies* and *Congo* respectively, and we hope to talk to Mike in a future issue about his time in the software publishing business.



» [C64] *Gridtrap* was one of the first releases on Tony's dad's LiveWire label.

» [SNES] *Super Off-Road*: get a hat, get ahead...

you think it would help make the game better if we sent you on a rally course?' It was in a Ford Escort Mexico in this forest and the instructor absolutely battered it with me in the passenger seat. We were coming up to this pendulum turn, we took it sideways and he hit this embankment and we were up on two wheels before coming crashing down, blowing out all the tyres. I asked him if that was supposed to happen. He said, 'Not exactly but I thought it might give you some ideas for the game.'

Impressive field research, Tony. You were still at Rage when the PlayStation arrived. What was that like to develop for?
I could see the PlayStation was bloody good and wanted to get going on it so I asked what assembler it used. They said it didn't. I had to learn to write in C, which I'd never done before. After three days, I was getting the hang of it and started writing what would become the worst game in the world.

Are we talking *Revolution X*?
It was one of the first PlayStation games from a UK studio. I heard Software Creations turned it down but we were quite a new studio so we said we'd take it on and try and do a good job. But it was shit. And I fucking hate Aerosmith.

Things thankfully got better with your next PlayStation titles, *Darklight Conflict* and *Space Debris*.
Darklight Conflict was designed by a guy from Yorkshire called Colin Parrot, a great programmer, and it was a great space game – almost *Elite*-like but with more battles. I wrote a really good engine to get that working on the PlayStation and I reckoned I could make it even better if I added in a ground section so you weren't only in space but on a planet, as well. That's where *Space Debris* came from. From my head.

» [PC] *Space Debris* let Tony get his rocks off in C.

You moved to the Xbox as lead programmer on *Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance*, which is infamous for having adverts that literally dripped blood onto the pavement.
Acclaim were good at doing weird shit like that. Naming your child Turok, painting pigeons at Wimbledon... they were nutters. That might be why they went bust in the end.

What was your favourite platform to work on?
Working on the C64 was brill because I could make the machine dance and squeal but I also liked the PlayStation, because it was such a step up.

Since 2010, you've been working in the educational software sector. Would you ever return to the games industry?
I do miss writing games and the people... maybe if I started my own company, so I could treat games programmers properly, like humans. Even though most of us aren't human at all.

Thanks to Tony and Martyn Carroll for their help with this feature.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

CRUSTY STARFISH: Please can I have a refund for the joysticks broken playing *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*?

Believe it or not, I've had that said to me a million times. The joystick we were using [during development] was the Competition Pro, a very robust stick that could take all the waggling, but I do know that when we tried other joysticks, their shelf life wasn't more than a few weeks.

ALEX79UK2: Did you ever get to meet Roland Rat, and if so was he as difficult to work with as the rumours suggest?

Yeah, he was a little shit [laughs]. No, these licences would just turn up on our desks. No direction about what kind of game to make or anything. *Roland's Rat Race* was initially supposed to be for a catalogue and the original developers had fluffed it up. They needed it 'done yesterday' so me and Dave [Collier] said rather than drive into Manchester every day, we'd write it from home, which we did – in three weeks flat.

Northway: Did Ocean have a library of routines you could use?

No. I did! I wrote my own and ended up using them in virtually every game I wrote on the C64. You'd do your own scrolling, sprite multiplexing, collision detection method... and that went with you because you'd always start your next game based on your previous game. And no, I didn't share.

FGasking: Have you worked on any games that never got released?

Only *World In Conflict: Soviet Assault*. I was so pissed off as it was a really nice game and the PC version had a rapturous following. Our Xbox 360 and PS3 conversions were basically completed and looked brilliant and played superbly... but they withdrew them. It was a real kick in the teeth.

Vandal Hearts

COME FOR THE STRATEGY. STAY FOR THE BLOOD

» PLAYSTATION » 1996 » KONAMI

I've been well aware of *Vandal Hearts*' brilliance for some time now, but never found the time to add it to my 'to play' list.

Even though Konami's strategy RPG has been in my collection for several years now, the thought of jumping into a lengthy epic really didn't excite me and I'd regularly pass it over in favour of a shooter or anything else that would be less time-consuming. As it stands, I should have visited *Vandal Hearts* earlier as it's a tremendously solid take on the popular genre.

Granted, it's not perfect and it lacks the job structure of similar games like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, but what it does offer over many of its peers is great characters, a surprising politically charged plot and some truly satisfying combat encounters. Oh, and lashings and lashings and lashings of blood.

I knew *Vandal Hearts* has a propensity for being something of a claret-spiller, but I didn't realise how over-the-top it actually was until I killed my first enemy. After being introduced as travelling merchants, Ash and his loyal followers Client and Diego are ambushed by thieves. Happily engaging with the filthy vagabonds, Ash cuts one down, and as he delivers the killing blow, blood erupts everywhere. I've not seen so much gore on-screen since Johnny Depp's character got sucked into a bed during *A Nightmare On Elm Street* and I assumed the excessive gore spillage was down to Ash being a skilled swordsman.

I quickly realised that it didn't matter whether you were using a cleric to smite an enemy with a piddly mace, or dispensing an irritating foe with the titular Vandal Heart (a dangerous, soul-hungry sword) the effect was always the same – fountains of blood that sprayed with all the intensity of the Bellagio's water fountains at the end of *Ocean's Eleven*. Despite its story, entertaining characters and cleverly constructed scenarios, it was those constant promises of gushing blood from my defeated foes that helped spur me on through *Vandal Hearts*' 17-hour running time. I wonder, then, what on earth that says about me?

DIEGO:
THAT SHOULD TEACH
YOU GUYS A...HUH?
DIEGO ARCHER L5
5% HP
38/38
PRAIRIE 5%
12
0/ 12
0/ 14

>> This month we find out if Revolution Software's dystopian sequel has been worth the long wait. We also get busy with the Command & Conquer Remaster, go digging with Mr Driller and play a lot of Darius games

»[PC] The game usefully highlights newer options and exhausted avenues during conversations with NPCs.

Mini-K
Android Finger
Scanner
Nothing
Hey. Anything that makes your tongue glow in the dark can't be bad for you! It's science!

Beyond A Steel Sky

AS REFRESHING AS A CAN OF SPANKLES

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PC
- **ALSO ON:** LINUX, MAC, IOS
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **PUBLISHER:** REVOLUTION SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** REVOLUTION SOFTWARE
- **PLAYERS:** 1

It's never easy revisiting something after a long time, and it's been 26 years since *Beneath A Steel Sky* captivated adventure gamers. But there's always been a place for a sci-fi mystery with a good sense of humour in the gaming market – the only question was whether Revolution Software's sequel could recapture the magic with today's technology.

Beyond A Steel Sky is set ten years after the original game, with Robert Foster preparing to move on from his home village in the Gap. Just as he's due to set off, a child named Milo is abducted and taken in the direction of Union City – the location of the original game. Having left his robotic buddy Joey in charge a decade ago, Robert finds a place transformed. But beyond the utopian veneer, something doesn't feel quite right, whether it's the LINC replacement MINOS, the insincere cheeriness of everyone you meet or the fact that Joey is nowhere to be found. What's more, he has a problem – the dead man he found on the outskirts of the city seems to be connected to the kidnapping, and he needs to find out how.

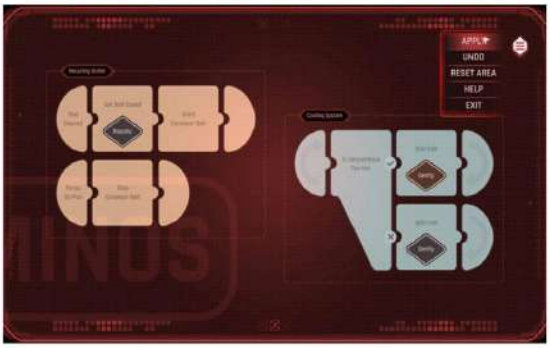
First impressions are very good. Much of the establishing story is told via an opening comic sequence by Dave Gibbons. The in-game graphics retain this style and while they aren't the most graphically taxing in the world, as you might expect given that the game made its debut on iOS, the pop-up speech and caption bubbles do sell the style well. The game is always attractive, with only a couple of slightly obvious low-res textures to spot when viewed up close. Background tunes are well-composed, but the voice acting is definitely

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Beyond A Steel Sky* is the sequel to Revolution Software's *Beneath A Steel Sky*, a point-and-click adventure game originally released in 1994 for PC and Amiga. That game cast players as Robert Foster, a man abducted without reason and taken to Union City, a dystopian metropolis governed by the LINC computer. *Beyond A Steel Sky* was first announced in 2019, and reunites the original writer Charles Cecil and artist Dave Gibbons, best known for his work on *Watchmen*. The game made its debut via the Apple Arcade subscription service for Mac and iOS, before moving to other computer platforms as a full-priced retail game.

»[PC] It's Aspiration Day in Union City, and nobody seems to care about a potential child abduction.

»[PC] This is your hacking interface – those diamond-shaped blocks are compatible and can be swapped.



✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Command & Conquer Remastered Collection

Many of the original *C&C* team were involved with this and it shows. It's a truly great collection.

DREW

Bloodstained: Curse Of The Moon 2

This *Castlevania III*-inspired follow-up was a summer surprise. The first one is worth checking out, too.

»[PC] Making use of your inventory items is quick and easy, but never automatic.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
BENEATH A STEEL SKY

▼ SOMETHING NEW
TECHNOBABYLON

»[PC] The way speech and narration bubbles appear on-screen is a nice comic-style touch.

»[PC] Robert's pursuit of the kidnapping tends to lead him into all sorts of trouble.

»[PC] Employees of the Council seem like people you might want to keep your distance from.

enthusiastic, to put it lightly. The dialogue is at least genuinely funny quite a lot of the time, providing plenty of sly nods to our own world as well as in-universe humour, and Robert provides an excellent straight man counterpart to the colourful cast of characters he meets.

The only problem is that to begin with, you won't feel like you're making any progress at all. Your initial task of simply getting out of the opening area and into Union City does succeed in teaching you the basics of the game, including your first interactions with the game's primary puzzle mechanic, MINOS hacking. When you activate your device, you'll be able to see the operational flowcharts of any device within a certain range, and edit them by dragging movable blocks. If you have more than one device within range, you can transfer compatible blocks between devices, which may either solve your problem or at least allow you to move the attribute to a more useful place. However, this introductory area is perhaps more complex than it needs to be. Even if you exclude the various conversations you'll have along the way, there are a dozen different interactions you'll need to perform to pass this early section, and it does begin to drag.

Fortunately, once you get beyond that opening area the pace does pick up considerably, and enjoying the game's positive traits becomes a whole lot easier. While new elements are constantly thrown in alongside the initial mystery, it never feels as if the focus on the task at hand is being lost – any secondary objective that sidetracks you doesn't do so for too long, and always feels relevant to the wider plot. In true Nineties adventure game tradition, some of the puzzles are considerably more obvious than others, though you do at least have the option of consulting the pause screen for hints when you come across the trickier ones. If you do use that option, you'll be made to wait for a little while before accessing more direct hints, meaning that you are still given the chance for the penny to drop.

Those of you who enjoyed the Nineties original will surely cut this sequel some slack for its more obtuse puzzles – they are part and parcel of the retro adventure game experience, after all. The voice acting may be more divisive, as it can get rather hammy. We actually liked this, as it suits the larger-than-life characters and comic book theme, but we could see how it may grate. The indisputable problems are mostly of a technical nature – bystanders blocking your path, the occasional moment where a camera is stuck behind a character during dialogue scenes, and on one occasion a missing dialogue box that required us to load up a recent save. There's nothing catastrophic here, but it leaves the game feeling slightly unpolished.

If you've ever had a soft spot for classic adventure games, *Beyond A Steel Sky* will make you happy. Fans of the original game will undoubtedly get the most from this sequel, but it also holds up as its own experience – you'll never feel out of the loop as important plot points are explained naturally and adequately along the way. The game does everything you'd hope in terms of balancing an interesting tale with tricky puzzles, combining that retro sensibility with modern presentation, and that's not always easy. Hats off to Revolution for pulling it off. ✱

In a nutshell

Slight pacing issues and the odd technical problem mean it's not a perfect experience, but *Beyond A Steel Sky* is a solid adventure game that carries forward all the best bits of its Nineties predecessor.

>> Score **82%**

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Mr Driller: DrillLand

» **System:** Switch, PC » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

We've waited a long time for an official English version of *Mr Driller: DrillLand*, as the original GameCube version was cruelly denied an international release back in 2002. The game was considered something of a cult classic by puzzle fans, and the quality hasn't diminished a bit over the years.

The basic premise remains the same as in previous *Mr Driller* games – there's a big well for you to drill down, filled with coloured blocks. Blocks of the same colour join together and can be taken out as a group, and if you take out the support underneath a block, it'll fall. This can potentially crush our hero, but if a block falls into a group of four or more of the same colour, they'll all disappear. You've also got to find air capsules to replenish a constantly diminishing air supply, and have to avoid hard blocks that sap that air supply.

Where *DrillLand* elaborates on the formula is in its amusement park theme, which provides not only the plot of the game but its underlying structure. The game is made up of various attractions that present a different spin on the core *Mr Driller* gameplay. For example, Star Driller adds plenty of power-ups, while Drindy Adventures removes the air supply constraint and tasks you with collecting gold statues on your way down, but adds rolling boulders that can crush you. The most interesting mode is The Hole Of Druaga, which adds enemies, items and a map system to turn the game into a mini-RPG. Beat all of them and you can challenge a boss in the ultimate attraction.

Elaborating on a simple concept like this isn't often easy, and it's impressive to see how many ways Namco was able to do so. What's more, the art style works well in HD and the sound is as good as ever. If you like a good action-puzzle game, pick this up – it's the best version of *Mr Driller* out there.

» Score **88%**

»[Switch] Does the air supply in *Mr Driller* stress you out? Try hunting some statues in Drindy Adventures.

»[Switch] There are plenty of power-ups that add new flourishes to the established *Mr Driller* design.

Bloodstained: Curse Of The Moon 2

» **System:** Switch, PS4, Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £13.49

Having delivered a good take on the classic 8-bit *Castlevania* style once, Inti Creates has returned for a second retro adventure. Zangetsu is joined by three new characters that all feel sufficiently different from both their predecessors and one another. Unfortunately, the stages feel like more of the same, but harder, with the bosses presenting an uneven difficulty curve. You can mitigate this by choosing Casual mode, which gives infinite lives and removes knockback on damage, but in Veteran mode it can feel like a real slog. It's still decent, and the inclusion of co-op increases the appeal, but it just didn't grab us like the original.

» Score **76%**

Darius Cozmic Collection: Arcade

» **System:** Switch, PS4 » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £34.99

Taito's classic arcade shoot-'em-ups have been bundled into one neat package, comprising *Darius, Darius II/Sagaia* and *Darius Gaiden*. Various revisions are on offer for each of the first two games, with notes detailing the differences. Everything can be tweaked, too, from the expected game options to more interesting things like boss analysis and internal difficulty gauge displays. The games are good and have been handled well, but there are only three substantially different games on offer here. For more casual fans of the games who aren't concerned with so much customisation, the price may feel quite steep.

» Score **79%**

Command & Conquer Remastered Collection

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £17.99

The pathfinding is still as frustrating as ever and the FMV doesn't hold up, but by golly this is a tremendous remaster. From the moment the new enhanced EVA boot-up sequence starts, it's obvious a lot of love has been poured into both *C&C* and *Red Alert*. The new graphics are well-detailed (you can switch back to the original with a spacebar press), the enhanced music by Frank Klepacki is ace, while numerous quality-of-life tweaks have been made – like importing *Red Alert*'s sidebar to the original game. Add in all the expansion packs, dedicated servers and full mod support, and Petroglph's remaster becomes very hard to fault.

» Score **91%**

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COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

THE ADVENTURES OF LOLO

"I'm cheating here, as I own most of the games in the series and love them all. The *Lolo* games are my favourite in the puzzle genre, too. Here's a tip for *Lolo* fans – the puzzles in the Famicom and NES versions are different, so it's worth owning both versions."

PAID: $30

GOING FULL TURBO

This month's collector has a particular love for NEC's TurboGrafx-16

This month's reader, Pete, is a clever old soul because his impressive videogame collection has grown along with him. "I started with the Atari 2600," he tells us. "I held onto most of my games, and as I reached my mid-twenties I started to buy older games I missed out during my childhood. So I think that was the tipping point when I also became a collector.

Many of us covet the games we didn't own growing up, and Pete is no different. In his case, a regular income allowed him to focus on a complete collection for the TurboGrafx-16, a console he used to love playing at his neighbour's house. "Once I started collecting games in my twenties, I became fascinated with the console again," he says. "There were only 138 titles released in the United States, so it didn't feel like an overwhelmingly large amount of games to collect. I decided to try and collect a full set, complete in their flimsy boxes. The games themselves are already on the rare side, so collecting copies with the boxes made it extra challenging."

The challenge has been worth it to Pete, though, as it meant he met a lot of other TurboGrafx collectors as he completed his collection. "It took many years and a lot of patience," he admits, "it was a really fun journey to hunt each title down." That quest took Pete 15 years, with things becoming more challenging in the final two as he finished off his collection. Pete's pride led him to showing his gear off on Instagram and he certainly recommends joining the platform. "The community of collectors on Instagram are a great group of people, lots of positivity," he continues. "I got to meet some collectors through Instagram who helped me complete my sets. Beyond that, I started to really enjoy taking the pictures. It was another reason to go through my collection and replay some of the games."

Focusing on certain systems means that Pete has been more than aware of the rising price of collecting, but he maintains there's a good reason why it's happening. "The number of people interested in these games continues to grow," he explains. "Old games haven't become outdated as new game consoles are released, they're still fun to play! I feel very fortunate that I have been able to experience the history of videogames, from the Atari 2600 all the way to the present and beyond. It's a very exciting hobby because there's an endless amount of games to play and history to discover."

So with all that in mind, what tips does Pete have for those wanting to build their own collections, TurboGrafx-focused or otherwise? "Take your time and enjoy it," Pete advises. "It's all about having fun, and most importantly, playing the games. Plus, it's great to meet other collectors and talk about the games! If you're going for a full set, it can become very stressful, so patience is important. Also, so many retro game sets can be super expensive, so if you want to avoid the expensive titles, consider collecting a subset. For example, I just finished collecting every Sega Genesis game with the classic black grid case art. There was no game in that subset that was terribly expensive, and a vast majority of those games are super fun to play, too." ✱

BIO

NAME:
Pete

LOCATION:
New Jersey, United States

FAVOURITE GAME:
Super Metroid

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
TurboGrafx-16

COLLECTION WORTH:
£20,000+

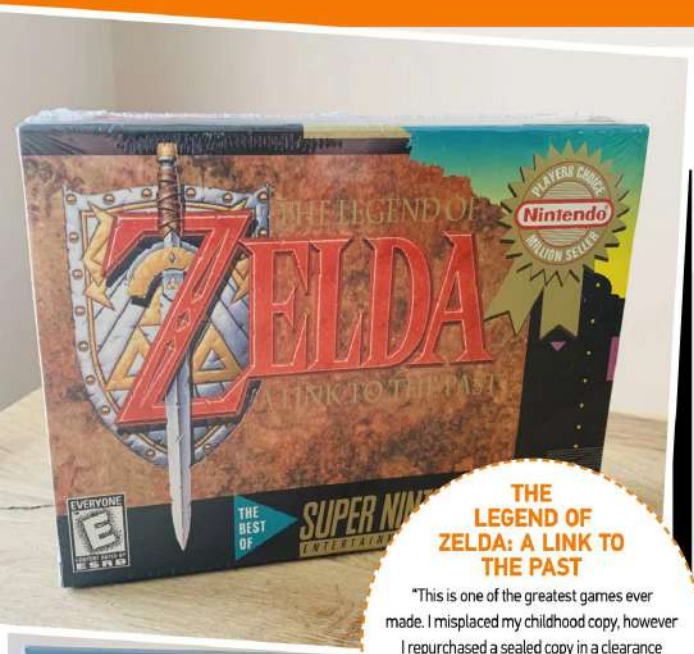
INSTAGRAM:
super_grafx

STRIDER

"To this day, there's still not another game I've played that is packed with more amazing setpieces. It's all killer, no filler."

PAID: $69.99
(IN 1990)

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

"This is one of the greatest games ever made. I misplaced my childhood copy, however I repurchased a sealed copy in a clearance bargain bin over two decades ago. Because I had already completed the game years before, I left the new copy sealed. And I still have it sealed today!"

PAID: $20

ANOTHER WORLD 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (PS4)

"I originally owned this game when it came out for the PC in the Nineties. When Éric Chahi first remastered this game for the PC back in 2006, I came across a bug and emailed the support address. Éric [wrote back] personally with a way to work around the bug. I totally freaked out!"

PAID: $50

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

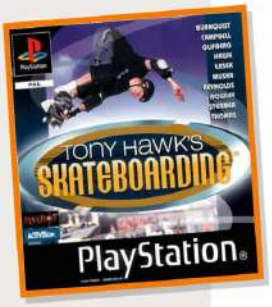
GIMMICK!

"Released late in the Famicom's life cycle, the game has stunning pixel art and enjoyable gameplay. What makes this game extra special to me is the soundtrack. It's my favourite videogame music of all time (with *Ecco The Dolphin* on Sega CD being a close second)."

PAID: $700

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices



THE COVER STAR

TONY HAWK'S SKATEBOARDING

There are multiple options when buying the original PAL game. The PlayStation, Dreamcast and Game Boy Color versions go for a **tenner**. The N64 version is pricier, starting at **£8** for a loose cart and reaching **£60** complete. The N-Gage version can be found for as little as **£3** complete.

SCUBA DIVE

Mike Richardson's adventure game is pretty cheap. Different Spectrum variants go between **£1 to £6**, while the C64 tape tops out at **£9**.

SALAMANDER: DELUXE PACK PLUS

Konami's compilation includes *Salamander* and *Salamander 2* and ranges from **£55 to £85** on Saturn depending on condition. The PlayStation alternative goes from **£35 to £65**.

BASKETBRAWL

This Atari 7800 release starts at **£23** for a lose cart and can reach **£63** in complete condition.

SHINING FORCE

This strategy gem has been steadily climbing in price. Carts for the PAL version start at **£30**, while complete boxed copies fetch as much as **£90**.

SPACE HARRIER II

Sega's vibrant shooter is still dirt cheap, and a PAL version starts complete at **£4**. The NTSC equivalents go for around **£18**.

MEGA DUCK

If you don't mind it unboxed, you can get this weird handheld for prices **over £20**. We've not seen any boxed systems, but they're most likely a lot more expensive

HOW MUCH?!

CAPTAIN DYNAMO

This late Codemasters release had the CPC community in a flutter. A **£4.50** starting price eventually rose to a staggering **£5,100** as six bidders sought to add it to their collections.

Prices correct at time of print

MAILBAG

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STAR LETTER

PAC-TASTIC!

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
I really enjoyed the feature about Pac-Man's 40th anniversary in issue 207, as I have a soft spot for the dot-eating yellow fellow.

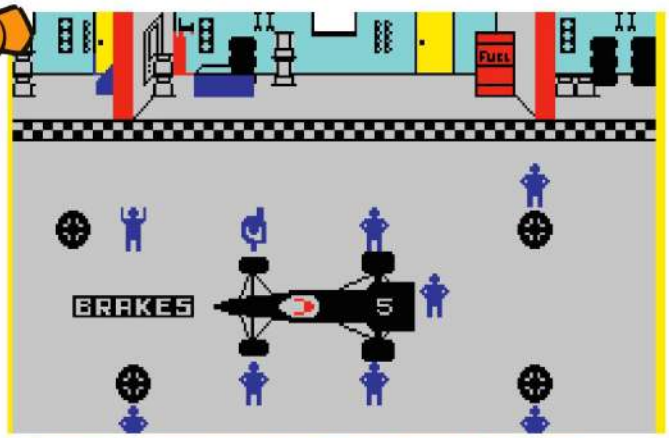
Back in 1982, I spotted an advertisement for the VCS/2600 cartridge in a magazine, and I was fascinated. I borrowed the game from a friend and played it for days, until – rather reluctantly – I had to give it back. That was *Pac-Man* for me! When I played the arcade game for the first time, I was a bit shocked: 'Hey, this cannot be the *real* Pac-Man!' I thought. I was also upset, as the arcade game was much harder than the conversion – or rather, I realised that I was not as good as I thought I was.

Anyway, I became a hopeless 'Pac-addict': I did TV zapping to find the famous *Pac-Man* commercial, and I wished for *Pac-Man*'s tabletop game as my birthday present. I even started saying 'gabo-gabo' (Italian for 'wakka-wakka') while eating lunch – although my mother made me stop that early.

I think I reached my peak by going to a costume party in a Pac-Man costume, made out of a cardboard box! Fortunately, my arms were long enough so that I could still reach my mouth cake... with a 'gabo-gabo' at each bite, of course!
Lorenzo AKA Chinnico

We're glad you loved the Pac-Man issue, Lorenzo, and we absolutely adore the photos you sent in to us. We'll get a bookazine out to you as soon as things get back to normal here at Retro Gamer.

» Here's Lorenzo, nicely highlighting just how much he loves *Pac-Man*.



» [ZX Spectrum] It's always nice to hear from developers, and Peter clearly enjoyed the *Formula One* feature.

A WINNING FORMULA

Hi Graeme,
I have read the [*Formula One*] article, which is very complimentary to me and George [Munday], so of course, I and Lena [my wife] really liked it, particularly as it was four pages with lots of screenshots. It was also nice and interesting to see the comments from Richard Taylor, who ported the game. He says that the only thing he received was the executable code. No one, to the best of my knowledge, contacted George or myself about the port, which in retrospect was a pity because I am sure that we would have been happy to provide him with the source code and any other information that he needed. However, that's all a long time in the past now.
Congratulations on getting the article published and many thanks for the extensive compliments. I will send a copy of the article to George's widow, Vicki. Keep well, keep safe and keep smiling.
All the very best,
Peter Wheelhouse

The article's author Graeme Mason was kind enough to share Peter's letter with us. We're glad you enjoyed the article, Peter, and it's great you enjoyed the additional insight from Richard.

SHORT AND SWEET

Hi all,
Just want to say I really enjoyed reading issue 209 this month, it was a great read. Your magazine has kept me sane during these times, as I enjoy reading the magazine in the bath with a cup of tea. This is my time away from the wife and kids and I need my time each month. Back To The Noughties is my favourite section each issue, so thanks to Nick for keeping this going.
Here's to many more issues,
James Long

Thanks James! It's lovely letters like this that make all the hard work worth it. We're assuming you didn't write this from your bathtub, right?

» Reading **Retro Gamer** and Back To The Noughties is perfect for your sanity, as James has discovered.

BORN LUCKY

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
Regarding Iain having never broken an Atari joystick, he must have been very lucky! When I were a lad, in between Hovis peanut butter sandwiches, the Atari 'black plastic ring of death' was quite well-known. Due to applying too much pressure in any one direction, the inner black ring would

CONTACT US

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» Were you heavy-handed with your joysticks or did you have a deft touch like our pal Iain Lee?

break. You'd then find the joystick unresponsive in that direction and you had to push it further.

As for other nice ones from the time, Slik Stik is one I recall, I had that for the Commodore 64. In fact, I broke that as well, in a fit of petulance, and as it was my friend Steve's. I had to order another one for him. When I ruefully explained why I was late giving it back, he casually replied: 'I had a feeling that's what had happened.' I'm still just as childish these days, especially when I do badly at *Defender*.

Cheers,
Tom Stungo

To be fair, Tom, we've waggled a few Atari sticks in our time and we've never managed to break one, either. We must have a delicate touch. Having said that, Darran absolutely wrecked a friend's Cheetah joystick once and within a few hours of them getting a replacement he managed to break that one, too. Needless to say, he didn't get asked around his house again for quite some time.

EASY TIGER

Hi team – but more specifically in this case, hi Darran,

When I first picked up **Retro Gamer** a few years ago now, one detail I liked was the inclusion of everyone's personal favourite games on the first page with the bios. With yours being *Strider*, I was curious to see if you have ever had the chance to play the Tiger Electronics version at all? I'm interested to see how they butchered that one. I didn't even know it existed until I happened across it on eBay one day. Yours for just £135 (plus postage)!

Cheers,
Garry Rooney

» As much as Darran loves *Strider*, even he wouldn't own this atrocity.

Your email made us all laugh Garry, so thanks for that. Darran has played that particular version and is still haunted by it. It's a terrible, slow port that shouldn't have been attempted on the machine. It regularly sells for between £10 and £15, so the seller is being quite optimistic with that asking price!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Andy's cat

One of the highlights of working from home has been our art editor Andy's cat, Storm, stopping him from working. We'll often start a video call and he's nowhere to be seen because his cat is sitting in his chair. He's now got an even swankier, comfier chair, so we'll probably never see him again.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Tony Hawk's game?

» [PS3] Amazingly, none of you picked *Tony Hawk: Ride* as your favourite game. We can't think why…

Dawid Venter
THPS2. The soundtrack and level design peaked at that point, back on the good old PlayStation.

Craig M Fawcett
Tony Hawk's 2 for me. It's damn near perfect. Killer levels, goals, controls and a stunning soundtrack. The blister I gained on my left thumb was worth it.

Olivier Braillon
The first one. It launched the genre and it was fun from start to finish. Great soundtrack, too!

Timbo C64
Tony Hawk 3 on PS2 – the pinnacle of arcade skate games. I was an active skater myself at that point in time, so two of my passions came together. I recently played through it again.

Fernando Briano
THPS 2 on PC. The soundtrack was incredible. I'll never forget playing it at a friend's house for the first time. I couldn't believe the bands I loved like Millencolin and Bad Religion were playing in this amazing game.

Kieran Desmond
Pro Skater 2 for me. Especially the warehouse, and the soundtrack.

Andrew Walker
THPS4 was the best for me, and the only I managed to 100%. A great mix of level design, challenges and an awesome soundtrack made it a joy to play on the original Xbox.

Ewen Kirk
Pro Skater 2 for me. It's the only one I really played except the *THUG* ones, but those went too far trying to woo the *Jackass* crowd.

Britt Roberts
The original for me. I had no interest in the sport, but the energy and presentation, as well as the subtly deep, yet accessible gameplay, felt like it was both open to all as well as being constantly rewarding.

Chris
THUG on the PS2. I loved having different areas to explore combined with a fun narrative. Eric Sparrow stealing and editing the footage of me doing a McTwist over a helicopter was my first experience of betrayal as a kid!

Andrew Collins
Tony Hawk 3 has a special place in my heart. I purchased a GameCube and *THPS3* and went back to my friends house to set it up. We had an ongoing rivalry with high scores on the Dreamcast version of *Pro Skater 2*. I left my brand-new GameCube there for a week so he could set some high scores for me and we went back and forth for weeks and weeks besting each other's scores. Great fun.

retro GAMER

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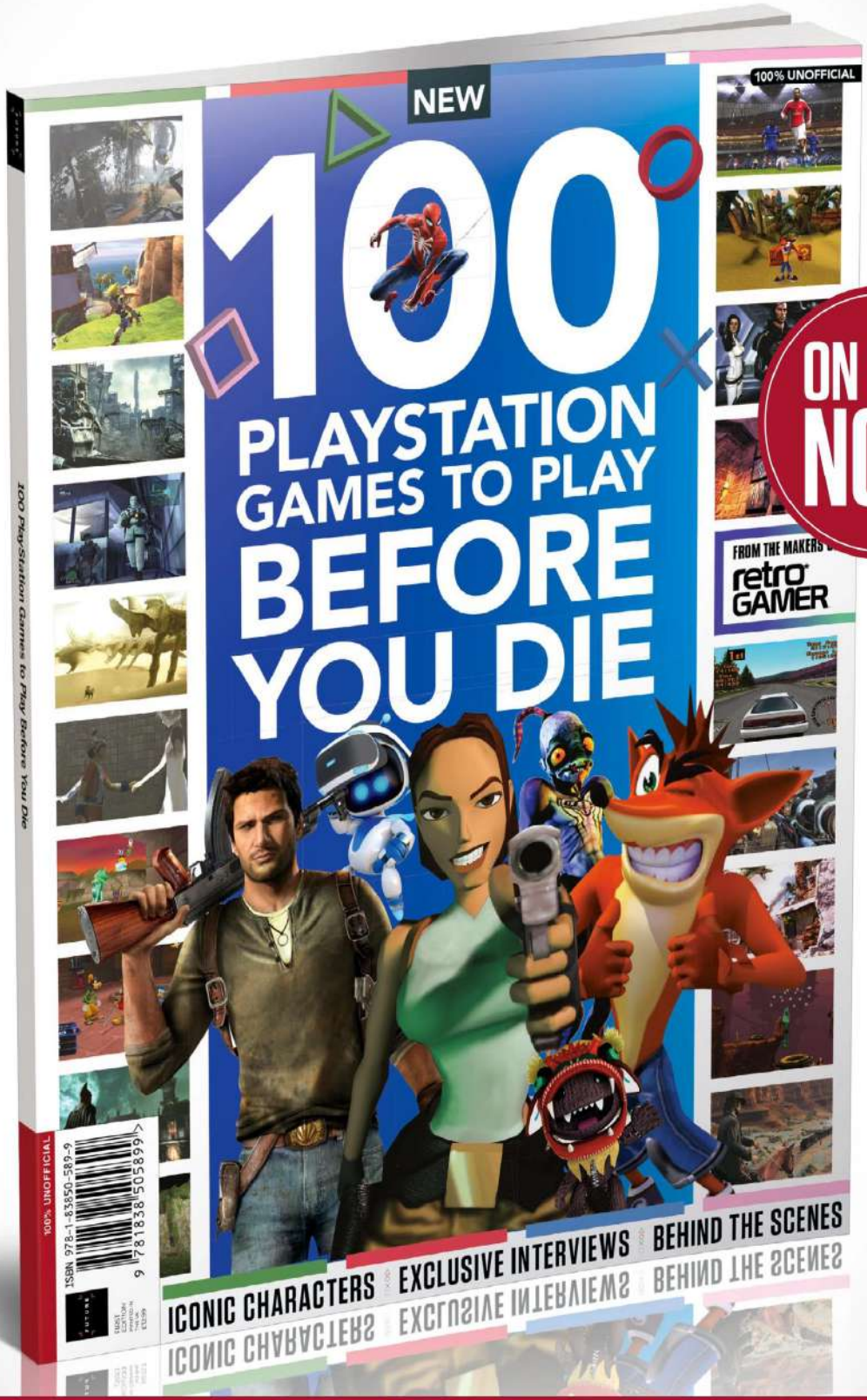

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ENDGAME

FLINK

» You know what's great about Flink? It's a really, really nice-looking game. That's no surprise, given that Henk Nieborg drew the graphics for it. But what's not so great about Flink is its villain, Wainwright. Seriously, read the back of the box – he clears out the people that might oppose him, only to use his awesome powers to put some dark clouds in the sky. What a waste. Go get him, Flink!

01

» "How should we, as a society, seek to enact justice? What is the appropriate balance between rehabilitation and punishment? Is capital punishment ever appropriate? These issues affect my client, the so-called 'Wicked' Wainwright."

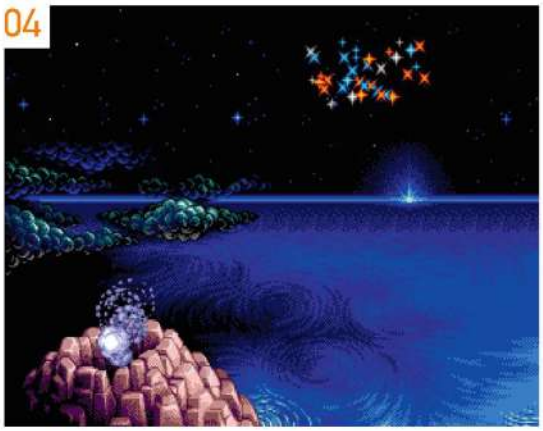
02

» "Your honour, my client is not perfect, no kidnapper could be. But he appointed appropriate guards for the island leaders during their imprisonment. Further, the supposed act of 'causing bad weather' is hardly to be considered a crime at all."

03

» "So why, your honour, is the prosecution seeking the most severe punishment for my client? Should he not be afforded the same treatment as he offered his captives? He has indicated a willingness to tolerate demonic guardians as wardens."

04



» "Instead of proper imprisonment, the prosecution seeks to have my client shot out of an active volcano. They wish to see him soaring high in the sky before exploding into fragments of his constituent colours, just before he crosses the horizon. Do any of his crimes justify this barbaric punishment?"

05

» The judge turns to the bench. Flink flashes a boyish smile. "Appeal denied," rules the judge. "You will report to Mount Oshioki for your punishment at seven o'clock in the evening." Flink beckons the public, beginning a chant. "E-rup-tion! E-rup-tion!" The crowd responds in kind, as if entranced.

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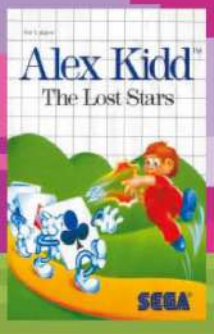

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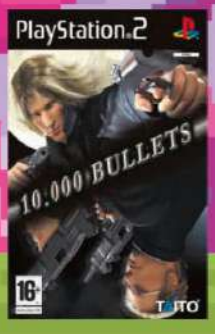

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